ONLY A LIFE

BY

MARY BASKIN.

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ONLY A LIFE.

ONLY A LIFE:

An Autobiographical Story.

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BY

MARY BASKIN,

AUTHOR OF "WILD VIOLETS," ETC.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

ARTHUR MURSELL.

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THE FOLLOWING STORY

IS GRATEFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY

DEDICATED (BY PERMISSION)

TO THE

Rev. W. MORLEY PUNSHON, M.A., LL.D.,

WITH THE PROFOUND RESPECT AND

CORDIAL GOOD WILL OF

The AUTHORESS.

INTRODUCTION.

ALTHOUGH the earnest writer of these pages has wished me to prefix a few lines to her book, it is not because she needs any other name than her own to secure for her writings the favour and appreciation of those who find an interest in the tender and the true.

Those who have been refreshed by the fragrance of the "Wild Violets," culled and combined by the same delicate hand, will be expectant of much fervid sympathy of soul, and much power of thought and language in anything touched by Miss Baskin's pen. Nor will they be disappointed as they turn these leaves. They will be charmed by the same glow and warmth; the same signs in every scene and picture of a pure and generous heart moving to appropriate expression a fertile brain.

The very breadth of heart displayed in the pages of this book will, no doubt, present a surface upon which the mere reviewer might try the arrows of his craft; while the critic who is candid as well as kind, might possibly be disposed to insert the pruning-knife amidst the rich luxuriance, to give the flowers and the fruit a better chance amidst the foliage. In works where feeling predominates there are always these openings for judicious counsel. But we are not so overdone with pure, true sentiment that we feel inclined to check it when it flows as richly and as tenderly as we find it here. And, whatever a few critics may say, the tens of thousands to whom the sense and sound of a beating heart—a heart beating kindly and lovingly near their own aches and sorrows—come like anodyne and music, will thank Miss Baskin for the comfort of these vivid chapters, and for the faithful straightness with which her finger ever points them to the springs of refreshment and of peace.

ARTHUR MURSELL.

Clapham, November, 1874.

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ONLY A LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

"I remember, I remember,
The house where I was born."

IN writing the story of a life we are too apt to colour it with our own dreams, fancies, and desires, until it loses its life-like proportions, becoming merely the reflector of our own ideas, and the mirage of our pet thoughts; therefore, in giving the outlines of a history full of thwarted purposes and unrealized dreams, I must ask the reader's forgiveness if it bears too distinctly the bigotry and egotism of personal views and predilections. Longfellow tells us that—

"Each heart has its haunted chamber,
Where the silent moonlight falls:
On the floor are mysterious footsteps,
There are whispers along the walls:"

and I dare assert that no person who has attained manhood or womanhood can deny that sentiment.

In the most pure, guileless life, in the heart most free from care, there are lurking shadows, cast by the sorrows of bygone years, and oft-times the memory is constrained as it were to retrace its steps through the silent corridors of times long

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past, and re-live old weariness and desolation, recalling deeds well nigh forgotten. The mind most hardened by its intercourse with a wearisome world, and despondent because of unavailing toil, has some bright retrospection to clear and brighten the gloom enshrouding it, of days when it was a pleasure to live, when the very fact of existing has been joy untold.

I have lately been haunted by the ghost of the past, and my haunted chamber is occupied by a tenant who will not submit to a decent interment and be numbered with the things which are not; while, like the doleful tolling of the passing bell, the words "It might have been," are ringing in my ears. Yes! it might have been. Little rosy fingers might have woven themselves into the tresses of hair, once brown, now grey; little rosebud lips might have pressed mine; little chubby limbs might have found a resting place upon my knee, and little hearts have received from me a passionate mother-love.

All these things "might have been," and are not. Sing on, oh poet! And as thou singest, "The saddest works of tongue and pen are these few words—it might have been," thy song shall find an answering echo in many a storm-tossed human heart. Yet I dare not murmur, for a sweet peace has come since the tempest, as though the Master's voice had lulled it to rest with the sweet words, "Be still." A softened and subdued light has illumined the darkness, soothing my weary spirit, and refreshing it, as the soft evening breezes refresh the languid frame of the weary traveller when the burden and heat of the day are over.

I should like to tell the story of my life with its burden of joys and sorrows, not merely to amuse and while away a

tedious hour, but to save others from being shipwrecked upon the same shoals or quicksands, or to bring those who have shared a like fate to the desired haven. And if it cheers a lonely heart, or stimulates some soul "to labour and to wait," I shall reap an abundant reward.

I can never give a definite idea of the house in which I first saw light. Dear old home of my childhood, what sweet associations cluster around thee!

An old rambling house, almost falling into decay, certainly not well built, for it looked as if the west wing had so long scrambled to attain the position of the east one that, having finally given it up in despair, it yet leant forward to sneer at its opposite neighbour; in fact, it was one of my childish beliefs that the top of the western tower had so swelled with a sense of its own importance that it was considerably larger at its summit than at its base. This peculiar sense of its dignity I attributed to the fact that it was surmounted by a weather-vane, an advantage the east one did not possess.

The rooms were large and commodious, but we had no fashionable drawing-room with its glittering baubles and expensive suites of furniture excluding childish frolics and dirty feet. Our living room was utterly unlike the modern ones, and many a game of hide-and-seek, blind man's buff, and old family coach, did those walls witness. No heavy curtains shut out God's glorious sunshine, so the golden beams danced upon its well-worn carpets like merry elfs, childish fingers vainly essaying to imprison them. Even now I cannot think of that room without a rush of emotion, dimming my eyes with tears, and an intense yearning to gaze upon it once more.

I do not remember my own mother, only as a sweet vision. Would to God I did! for it might have saved me many nights of fearful anguish and days of heart-sickening despair. Her portrait hung in the large dining-room, and by it I knew she had been a woman beautiful in the extreme and fair, with a wealth of sunny tresses falling over her shoulders like a veil of golden glory. I can remember even now with what childish admiration I worshipped at the shrine of her rare loveliness, and never ceased to wonder how my father consoled himself for her loss. Day after day I crept in to look at her when no eye watched my proceedings. Oh! mother, mine! *then* I marvelled how you could die and leave your noble husband behind. *Now*, when I know your story, I do not wonder at the thoughtful sadness round your sweet mouth, and only wonder how you endured the burden of your great sorrow. I have shed bitter tears over your trouble, and as I have since learnt to pity myself, so I pity you. Methinks the angels struck a higher note to welcome you when your troubles ended, and sang, as you entered the pearly gates of the Beautiful City beyond the reach of mortal ken, "She came out of great tribulation."

My father was, and always has been, to me the embodiment of all the truth, nobility, and beauty of the Christian character. He was the polar star of my life, and as such I reverenced and loved him with a passion almost amounting to idolatry.

My step-mother was anything but a lovely woman, and her conduct towards me was especially harsh. At that I have long ago ceased to be surprised, as I hated her with all the intensity of a passionate, wilful heart for taking the place of my lost mother. Then I was but a visionary rhapsodist,

imagining my sainted mother always with me, until on the foreground of that imagination my step-mother appeared, dispelling, by her presence, the idealism and beauty of my spiritual companionship. It was only when riper years brought keener thought that I discovered the nobility of character and trueness of heart concealed beneath a rough and uncouth exterior and harsh address.

I should fail in the attempt to describe my sister with her exquisite beauty and kindly heart. She inherited all the loveliness of our mother, and, alas! all the fearful delicacy of her constitution also. We called her "Sunshine," a pet name singularly appropriate.

Sad, indeed, would have been the heart that failed to respond to her joyous, happy nature. I think my father lavished an excess of tenderness and love upon her because she so closely resembled our mother.

There is a sanctity and beauty about the word "Mother" that all the ravages of time fail to destroy. No other earthly name could possibly gather round it so much beauty and so many hallowed associations. A true mother is the perfection of all goodness and beauty of character. Perhaps this was the reason why I so wished that I, like Sunshine, could possess, what seemed to me, the great boon of being personally like my own.

When I heard old friends praise my sister's beauty, and admire her golden hair, saying, with a smile, how like her dear mother she grew, I used to creep away to my little room, and looking in the glass, hate with a vehement hatred my swarthy skin and black hair.

I was singularly dark and sallow; no tinge of colour relieved the dinginess of my skin. Many bitter tears did I

shed over it, pitying myself with a sorrow equal to that of later years.

My own brothers, Ralph and Fred, were quiet, studious youths, yet always open to a romp, and I was their sympathetic *Mæcenas* in all their sports. For their sake, marbles, tops, and cricket had a charm for me, and I raced for a good innings with as much gusto as any schoolboy. From them I learnt to climb a tree and scale a wall as easily as most girls would dance a polka. In this I was not checked, as, our neighbours being few and far between, no scandalized eyes beheld, or venomed tongue reported, my "tom-boy" behaviour.

Oh, irrecoverable days of my childhood! Would that I could once more enter thy fairy regions, and taste again the youthful pleasures born of intercourse with my childish loves. Now I roam over the fields of fancy, and remember the rash vows I made never to leave my brothers, promising all the impossibilities of after years. One day we had freely discussed our future life. I was to wait at home while they went into the world to make the wealth which should afterwards support us; when it was made, we were to live as only children can agree to live, and death was to be forbidden the sacred precincts of our home to despoil us of our treasures, and sin to mar our happiness. Thus, in ignorance, we planned a life which should be a "thing of beauty" and "a joy for ever."

To this day I remember with a lurking sense of sadness the artless joy that filled my quixotic brain, as I dreamt bright visions of self-sacrifice for my brothers, and wondered how I could prove the trueness of my love for them, the very thought of the love they bore their plain little sister sending

a delicious thrill of joy through my tiny frame. Ah! in following years I learnt in Ralph's cause the meaning of self sacrifice, and thanked God that the great love I bore my brother enabled me to forego the crown of a woman's life for his sake; and to the last, until I closed his eyes in the long sleep of death, we were all in all to each other—friends true as steel, bound together by a deathless link of love, and kinship of mind. My precious brother! No waters of "Lethe" can ever efface thy blessed memory, or rob me of the sweet solace I find in dwelling on the beautiful traits in the character of one who walked with God, and is not, because God has taken him. And oh! the quiet submission of his great, loving mind, when to many his life would have been a living death.

Baby Tom was the only child of my step-mother. He happened to be one of those enormously fat babies who can never find their feet, and was the torment of my existence; if I was absorbed in a book, he would always choose that precise moment to set up a most deafening squall. If I was dressing a doll, his little fat hands would be extended, and nothing would pacify him until it was in his grasp, to have the thickness of its skull tested upon the nursery floor, or its hair torn from its head in a most malicious way. He completed our family circle, because, in these days of caste, I dare not introduce my much-loved nurse as one of it, though she was the pilot who steered our barks in the right direction, and by her example, showed us the way of eternal life made plain through a crucified Saviour.

When twelve years old I had literally devoured every readable book in my father's library, and then commenced feeding my craving for literature by perusing a cheap translation of

Dante's "Purgatorio." Next I revelled in Mrs. Hemans' works, and in imagination stood by "Gertrude Von der Wart," as she ministered to her suffering husband, feeling my soul catch the fortitude that strengthened and ennobled hers in the hour of trial, until I laid hands on Milton's "Paradise Lost," and mourned with poignant bitterness over the expulsion of our first parents from the Garden of Eden, or listened with the angels to the disclosing of the grand scheme of Redemption.

My brothers being my chief companions in study, as well as at play, fostered my precocious love of literature by scraps from Homer's grandest thoughts, until with me to live was to read, and to read was life. Fred, the younger of the two, was a born musician, and in the soft twilight he would discourse to us from our grandest composers, sometimes playing dreamily a pure old air that slowly died away like the echoing cadence of a vesper hymn, then rose full and grand, as if the spirit of the music triumphed over the dying echoes, bursting into new life and beauty at his touch, or else singing to us quaint old ballads, full of simple pathos and power, until our hearts were stirred with emotions no language could be found to express.

Thus passed my childhood. Let me look back upon it once more before I close the book of its remembrance. Let me in fancy see the companions of my youthful days, until I turn away with a desolation creeping over my heart that their memory fails to exorcise. Then I will draw a veil before it, and set my face and heart to carry out with stedfastness the aim and purpose of my life.

CHAPTER II.

GIRLHOOD is a stage of life peculiarly blessed by the innocence and purity of its thoughts, by the sentiments that pervade and the airy dreams that enrich it, opening a perfect storehouse of beauty that no after influences totally destroy. Girlhood! Let any woman, recalling that era of her existence, summon from the shades of the past each tender memory, and the enthusiasm of her then hopeful heart, untouched and unscared by the cares and struggles of after years. If she can look back upon it without a sigh for the joys that have fled, hers has been an exceptional experience, and her orisons of praise should burst forth with the returning light of each day, ascending in one continual strain of joyful thanksgiving.

When I had nearly completed my thirteenth year, I commenced my struggle for "Women's rights." Not the so-called ones attracting so large a share of attention at the present day, but those of an undeveloped brain and life seeking an outlet in forbidden channels, ruled by precisely the same code of laws, but having an entirely different termination. My step-mother informed my father that I was fast becoming a perfect book-worm, so I was duly summoned to appear before him in his *sanctum sanctorum,* and receive the paternal command to abandon such pursuits, excepting during certain hours of the day, when books chosen by him were to form my staple reading. I was forthwith furnished with the

Histories of England, Rome, and Greece, and a volume of "Butler's Analogy," Chaucer's poems being supplied as light reading. I tried hard to obey the parental behest; and, looking back to the time now, I can truthfully say that I strenuously strove to do so. But the trees might as well have been commanded to abstain from budding, the birds to cease their warbling, or the mountain torrent restrain its impetuous motion. So, as I could not pursue my reading openly, I did it by stealth, conning page after page greedily as a miser would have counted his gold, hungrily, and with the same sense of unsatiated craving. It is with unspeakable thankfulness I record the fact that through it all I read nothing that called the blush of shame to my cheek. Indignation, scorn, terror, compassion, and love were all excited in turn, and many fits of passionate weeping have I succumbed to over the sorrows of imaginary heroes and heroines, while at other times my heart has been filled with an intense and ardent desire for noble, true, and beautiful things; but my taste revolted against anything savouring of crime or the sensational passion miscalled by the holy name of Love, as portrayed in the lowest class of our periodical literature. "Ivanhoe," and, in fact, nearly all Sir Water Scott's writings, conveyed me into enchanted regions, entrancing my childish spirit with their beauty, while, for heavier reading, I studied passages of Milton's "Paradise Lost," together with Cowper's and Southey's most beautiful thoughts, also reading Isaiah and the Songs of Solomon simply for the exquisite beauty of their poetry. For this reason alone I pored over the pages of Sacred Writ, little dreaming that in after years I should cull from them my sweetest and richest comforts. Then I had no love for Christ or His cause;

He was to me the ideal of a perfect man—nothing more—and though His life and death possessed a charm untold for me, it was merely another form of man-worship. Little did I know *then* how I should one day ponder the words that fell from the sinless lips of the Christ Redeemer, drinking them in as pure and living waters to refresh my earth-tired soul, living in and by them, striving to obey His commands and follow in His footsteps as a child would hearken to the injunctions of a loving, tender mother. The Bible I of course read openly, as it was the book my father valued most, but the others I did not, for in our house novels of every description were banished as deadly poison, and religious tales were foresworn as wiles of the arch-enemy to betray our souls. I make no excuse for the wilful disobedience which kept me in such an abject state of terror for fear of discovery, that when the faintest rustle disturbed the stillness of the house, after its inmates had retired for the night, my heart would stop its beating, while the blood receding from my face would leave it of so grey and ashen a hue that I have started back appalled on catching its reflection in the glass. Dearly have I paid for my sinfulness, the penalty being that for many years I worshipped ideal beauty and things, to the utter depreciation of genuine, living worth. My knowledge of persons was supplied from books, and around the biographies of good men, read to me by my father, a halo of glory seemed to shine; Latimer, Cranmer, Ridley, and many others of like spirit, giving me my notions of Christian character, and Anne Askew, with a long line of equally brave women, my idea of womanly bravery and fortitude. Often in the land of dreams I stood by Hugh Latimer, who was my ideal of perfect grand and noble manliness, at the stake,

catching the inspiration of his noble mind. I have wandered, too, from the regions of reality to those of romance, roaming o'er the desert island with Robinson Crusoe, admiring the fidelity of his man Friday, until I wished some winds would waft like circumstances to me, that I might call such a man by the name of friend.

For months I concealed my "stolen waters," works of fiction, drinking of them oft and deeply; then a change came o'er the spirit of my dream. My step-mother discovered the locality of the well from which I drank. A remarkable place it was; between the bed and the mattress during the night, and 'twixt the bolster and pillows during the day, excepting Fridays, when the bedroom underwent a charwoman's inspection. On that day I used to fold the volumes in stiff brown paper, and conceal them up the chimney until she took her departure. Sunshine and I being trained in all housewifery duties, were expected to make our bed, which circumstance suggested to me the safety of my novel hiding place. The noble sum of sixpence a week was the amount of pocket money allotted to me, and exactly two-thirds of it went to swell the contents of the till belonging to the widowed proprietress of a circulating library. Far be it from me to describe the literature contained in the said library. I can only state that, to find one readable book, I was compelled to overhaul about a hundred volumes. After a time I began to notice that on every occasion of my entering her premises a frown, as black as a cloud surcharged with thunder, gathered upon the brow of the widow, and once or twice she requested me to transfer my custom to a neighbouring book-stall. After my usual fashion, I was one day turning all her books topsy-turvey in my search for a new treasure, when I distinctly

heard my step-mother ask for the "Daily News." Shrinking into a corner, I waited until she was served, trusting that I should be successful in escaping her keen eyes, but, unfortunately, she turned, and seeing me, to my infinite disgust and annoyance, caught me by my shoulder and demanded of me what I was doing there. I dared not tell a direct untruth, so partially confessed my misdemeanors, still, however, concealing my hiding place. In the evening a regular search was instituted, resulting in the discovery of an old volume of Cowper's poems, which I had purchased for fourpence, Selina Hemans' poems, for which I paid threepence, and four volumes of the "British Poets," which cost me eighteenpence a piece—a sum I had managed to save by dint of self-denial in the shape of fruit and sweetmeats—these were confiscated and carried to my father's office, whither I followed amid signs of the direst parental displeasure. My case was heard. I was judged guilty; my sentence being that I should be sent to a boarding-school, to be "kept under," as my step-mother phrased it. The very words, "kept under," assumed a magnitude so great that I trembled exceedingly, and, with many bitter tears, promised to forego all reading if only pardoned and the sentence revoked. In vain! So I left the room, and, creeping out under the shadow of the trees, I abandoned myself to tearful despair. Everything around seemed in harmony with my sore grief; even the bells of a neighbouring church tolled out the words, "Kept under," to my imaginative ear, and our great Newfoundland dog, Rolo, came slowly towards me as if he, too, comprehended the significance of the words. What a world of meaning they possessed for me. I think I should have defined them as tyranny and rule.

What hard lines for a previously ungovernable child. I must have sobbed myself to sleep by Rolo's side, for the next thing I remember was a shout from Ralph, "I'm bothered, Fred, if there isn't Meg here in the arms of Morpheus! A pretty predicament for a young lady of fourteen to be in, with the eyes of two individuals of the masculine gender upon her!" Hearing this, I sleepily aroused myself, and soon informed them of the fearful trouble I was in. Fred gave a prolonged whistle, while Ralph sat down, and putting his arm round me, essayed to comfort me by painting glowing pictures of the "sprees" and larks awaiting me in my school life, until his funny stories roused and retained my interest, and the dread of being "kept under" gradually lessened, and I even began to wonder what my schoolfellows would be like, and if they would have as many pretty frocks as I possessed; also whether the said frocks were made high in the neck and had long sleeves, a style I much admired. From this comparatively bright aspect of affairs, I was suddenly recalled to the dark one by the voice of my step-mother, who angrily bade me come into the house at once, saying that I should, she was certain, have rheumatic fever in the morning, with lying out on the grass, which was quite damp with the dew—a prospect, as you may imagine, far from pleasant to me. And I think it would have been impossible anywhere to find a more miserable child than I was when, after being forced to swallow a basin of gruel, to counteract the effects of my thoughtless conduct, I climbed wearily to my room. Even when I tried to say "Our Father," the doleful words "kept under," took their place, and getting up from my knees, I laid my weary, throbbing head on my pillow, and for the second time sobbed myself to sleep.

The next morning I awoke with the sunlight streaming into my room, and the birds warbling sweetly outside my window; but the experiences of the previous day instantly flashing through my mind, rendered me impervious to these cheering influences. So, in a dull, stupid way I commenced dressing, and having completed my toilet, hurried down to the breakfast room, and in moody silence took my accustomed seat at the table. At the conclusion of the meal, my step-mother desired me to follow her to her room, in order that my wardrobe might undergo a thorough inspection by her, which I accordingly did. To my infinite joy and amazement she appeared to think that a school-girl's outfit should resemble a wedding *trousseau*, and as she put her veto on one dress and another, deciding that they should be replaced by new ones, my vanity rose, and with it my spirits, as I thought of the amount of patronage I should be able to assume towards those of my schoolfellows who happened to be less favoured in that respect. The school selected as my future habitation was in the neighbourhood of Southampton, whither my father took me one day in order that I might see my new home, and that he might make arrangements for my admission as a boarder after the midsummer vacation. I remember how eagerly, when the train stopped at the terminus, I thrust my head out of the carriage window, "to spy out the land," but nothing could I see save a few railway officials and clerks, who were evidently engaged in cracking small jokes at the expense of each other, whilst a drizzling rain enlivened the scene. I was hastened out of the carriage into a cab, and we were driven rapidly through the principal streets of the town, and on until we reached the suburbs. Even in the rain

everything looked beautiful, the sweetbriar shedding around a sweet perfume, while the clinging roses trained over the walls of the houses excited my rapturous admiration. At last we stopped before a charming villa residence, justly named "The Retreat," opening in the front on to a beautifully kept lawn, studded with flower beds, in the centre of which a pretty fountain sparkled and played. To the right lay large smooth croquet and archery grounds; to the left a first-rate orchard, and, as I afterwards found out, a good kitchen garden behind, which supplied the table of the principals with vegetables. My father's knock echoed through the house, to the tune of "Kept under," and, quelled and subdued by the recollection of those two ominous words, I literally trembled in my boots. The door was at length opened by a neat, good-tempered looking maid, who ushered us into an adjoining room, where we silently waited the interview, so momentous for me, with the Misses Shelton, who in their advertisement always stated that they only received a limited number of "select pupils." With a painful throbbing of my heart and catching of my breath, I listened to the jingling of pianos and occasional murmur of voices that reached us from another room; then the door opened, and Miss Shelton appeared on the scene. I must describe her as I saw her first, for my whole heart went out to her as the river rushes into the sea. A woman anything but beautiful, yet never plain. How can I convey any idea of her changeful face? Large, clear, grey eyes, perfectly wondrous in the delight of their expression, redeemed it from being a common-place one; it was a face, once looked upon, never forgotten. I think the "peace of God which passeth understanding" had stamped its sweetness and purity upon

her countenance. As she came forward in her graceful, benignant way, I instinctively loved her. She welcomed us cordially, and my father being quite satisfied with all arrangements of the establishment, including terms, it was decided that I should enter it as a half-yearly boarder at the expiration of the Midsummer vacation six weeks after. Before we took our departure, Miss Shelton introduced us to her sister, Miss Ellen. My first feelings towards *her* were those of repugnance and dislike; her small, deep-set eyes seemed to scan me from head to foot, as though searching for a speck of dirt, or symptom of general untidiness, which scrutiny undergone, my dislike was intensified when she abruptly asked my age, disposition, character, and many other things, precisely as if she had been making inquiries respecting a servant. My father answered her in his usual quiet, courteous way, and we left the house.

CHAPTER III.

"Tears—rise in the heart—
In looking on the happy autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more."

AFTER we re-entered the cab, I experienced an indescribable yearning to throw myself into my father's arms, and implore him to pity me. It seemed as though I could bear everything, if only someone would plant a loving kiss upon my throbbing brow; but there were no mother's caresses, or sweet warm kisses for me, who so sadly pined for them. True, my father sometimes caressed me, but the tenderest, most devoted father can never quite fill a mother's place. However, my father's thoughts seemed far away from his child, so I curled myself up in my corner, and nursed my morbid thoughts.

We reached the terminus just in time to catch the express, and were very soon standing on the platform of our own railway station.

I have an indistinct notion that at family worship that evening my father offered up a special petition for me, praying that, in entering a new home and upon fresh duties, I might be abundantly blessed; but I have a vivid, ineffaceable recollection of what transpired after it. He called me, and said, "Margaret, darling, your mother was a true, noble woman, and though you are not personally like her, you bear her name. She *was* a *pearl* to me, dear; too precious to

dwell long here, and I want you, her namesake, to be what she was—a true comforter." Looking up, I saw the tears slowly coursing down his cheeks, and then, for the first time, I noticed how worn and ill he was looking. Clasping my arms round his neck, I besought him to let me remain at home, promising, with many tears, to forego everything displeasing to him. At last he succeeded in soothing and allaying my terrible grief, and then he explained to me how necessary it was that I should be educated, telling me that he thought it best for me to go to school. So, for more than an hour, the first and only time since the advent of Baby Tom, I found a resting place upon my father's knee, listening to his voice as he talked to me of a Heavenly Father who, he said, would watch over me. Oh, father! now that thou art treading the golden streets of the New Jerusalem, dost thou remember the words that fell like sweetest music on my ears, or the long lingering kiss thou pressedst upon my quivering lips, on that summer evening long ago? No kiss has ever been so purely blissful to me since, and, looking back, I thank God for the revelation of love and sympathy which it brought to my drooping heart. That night I crept away to my little room, where Sunshine was calmly sleeping, as if the world's woe and pain were already mine; I watched my sister as she slept, and felt as though I could not leave her. But, happily, childish sorrow, like all other sorrow, is alleviated by the great healer Time; so in a few days I became comparatively reconciled to my lot. At last the eventful day for my departure dawned. I went over the gardens, through every room, and took leave of the cats, birds, and dog. Then came my sorest trial. I bade farewell to my darlings, Ralph and Fred, leaving Sunshine and my father till the last (I shook

hands coldly and sulkily with my step-mother, but Baby Tom I refused to see); and then, accompanied by nurse, I started for school. That evening I was fairly launched into my new life, nothing remaining for me to do but make the best of it.

I was very tired, and soon obtained permission to go to bed. The room was shared by five other girls, and volumes could be written concerning the antics and nonsense indulged in by them. I am sure the walls of a boy's school would, if blest with a tongue, find it impossible to rehearse such a variety of freaks or reveal a greater number of sprees than ours could have done. Eva Chester, my bedfellow, was their ringleader. She could excite them to any mischief, or silence them by a word. I did not find this out on that first night, but I made a discovery, which was that she was truly striving to be a Christian. One of the girls coolly informed me that Eva was studying for a "D.D." to affix to her name, therefore made long prayers her particular branch of study. In my ignorance I believed what she told me, until Eva, breaking off in the midst of a merry laugh, turned to me and said—

"Miss Munro, I am not studying for that, but for a higher degree than any to be won here. I am preparing to take honours in heaven by following in my Saviour's footsteps on earth."

There was complete silence for a few moments, then her laughter again rippled through the room, and looking up, I found her, with mimicry inimitable, personifying Miss Ellen's deportment and conversation during the evening. Before she got into bed, I saw her look with wistful eyes at a photograph she held in her hands, kissing it again and again. She placed it between the leaves of her Bible, simply saying, as

she caught my inquiring glance—"It is my mother." I felt the tears rush to my eyes as she said it, and, in a subdued tone, I inquired if she could remember her mother, she replied—

"Oh! yes; she taught me all that I know of good. My own sweet mamma!"

I impulsively raised myself in bed, and said—

"I am motherless."

"You are wrong there, dear. We each have a mother; if yours was good, they are both in heaven, and can care for us there as much as ever they cared here."

I told her what papa had told me of my mother, and tried to describe her loveliness, until we quite exchanged confidences, and, with the usual impulsive freedom of girlhood, promised to be friends. Long after she was fast asleep I lay awake, pondering on the way in which she had spoken of meeting her mother, as if heaven were only the home to which all were journeying; but at last I also fell asleep.

The next morning I awoke with a start. Someone was squeezing cold water on to my face out of a sponge, while the other girls were indignantly remonstrating at the rudeness shewn to me. Quick as thought I darted out of bed and emptied the contents of the water bottle over the aggressor, and by so doing, made my first enemy at school. Never shall I forget the rage that like boiling lava, rushed through my veins as I exclaimed against the insult I had suffered at her hands, declaring I would show her that Margaret Munro was not the girl quietly to submit to such indignities. But my speech, instead of helping, injured my cause, and entailed still greater suffering upon myself, for she had evidently overheard the conversation between Eva and

me on the previous night, and taunted me as a liar for having spoken of my mother as beautiful, winding up by saying that if I fancied I was going to palm off my own ugliness on that score she would soon show me my mistake. Sneak that I was, I straightway went to Miss Shelton and complained of the girl, who proved to be Eva Chester's sister. I was told that it would have been much better to have acted in a more dignified manner, and taken no notice of the affair, as they (the Misses Shelton) never punished the young ladies for such actions; but they promised to speak to Miss Minnie, and request her to refrain from playing such unpleasant practical jokes for the future. And they evidently did so, for during the whole day I heard whispers most mysterious about *somebody* who was a tale-bearer, and during the hour allowed for recreation an old nursery ditty was resurrectionized, and I heard Minnie Chester singing, in a sweet, liquid voice—

"Tell-tale tit,
Her tongue shall be slit,"

With the additional promise of "Every little dog getting a little bit." This was almost unbearable, but the crowning piece was yet to come. When we went to "roost," as the girls termed it, one of them commenced describing a trick she had played the music teacher in the morning, but was quickly interrupted by another, who demanded instant silence, and, in melodramatic style and tones, implored them to beware of the "Spy in the camp," who had never learnt the quaint little song which they, the more highly favoured ones, had been taught in infancy, after which appeal a trio sang the song of the morning. My cup was full; I could bear no more, so, throwing myself on the floor, I sobbed with mingled grief and

passion, until Eva entered the room, and comprehending at a glance the state of affairs, came and sat down beside me on the floor, and pushing my dishevelled hair from my forehead, kissed me tenderly, and said—

"I am so sorry for you, dearie. It is a great pity you told this morning. However, you will soon learn that it is considered a breach of school-girl honour to tell tales." Then she turned and faced the other girls, exclaiming—"I would rather be a bearer of tales than one of a heartless lot who could intentionally cause suffering like this."

I think something in her eyes must have awed them, for the room was quickly darkened, and soon the girls were all quietly sleeping in their respective beds.

For months after this a system of annoyance and provocation was carried on by them, until, following Eva's advice, I endeavoured, by kindness, to make them forget the first episode in my school life; and when a large hamper of fruit and cakes from home arrived one day, by permission of the principals I invited the girls to a "feed," which put an end to our petty quarrels and grievances, except in Minnie Chester's case. *She* neither forgot nor forgave. The morning and evening prayers, which formed a part of the daily routine, became a source of great pleasure to me, because of the psalms and hymns that we were accustomed to sing. There was another treat I must not forget to mention. The church we attended contained a splendid organ, and occasionally we were allowed to enjoy a morning of uninterrupted pleasure, while the organist played or allowed the elder girls to play for us, thus fostering our love of music. To me it was one vast Eden of delight, and I have sat enraptured and dumb under its mighty spell,

as waves of harmony rolled o'er each other through the dimly-lighted church. Ever shall I remember one golden autumn day, when I listened to that glorious anthem, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," till my heart was too full for words, and overcome by conflicting emotions, I fainted. For days afterwards the music and the words rang in my ears.

According to the rules of the school, all the pupils were obliged to attend the Episcopalian church. Concerning the sermons preached there, the less said the better. None of the poetry or imagery of the Poet Isaiah ever o'ershadowed or crept into them. We poor mortals were obliged to content ourselves with the prosaic platitudes which certainly contained none of the essential qualities of the "Milk for babes" so necessary for the minds of the younger portion of a congregation. The clergyman was a good and true disciple of the cross, but he certainly missed his vocation when he undertook to be the bearer of the tidings proclaimed for the healing of the nation. So I used to take my place in the sanctuary, Sabbath after Sabbath, and while there dream of my loved ones, picturing my brothers in the chapel at home, and my father heartily responding to the petitions offered up by our minister, while I groaned out, with the rest of the "miserable sinners" in church, "Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law." I do not for one moment believe that this response was spoken by the others in the same insincere, mechanical way that I gave utterance to it, because in my case it was a matter in which the omission entailed punishment, and the response cost nothing except an occasional twinge of conscience at my insincerity, but for which I think I could have slumbered on in my sins till the day of judgment, for aught of rousing or constraining

power contained in the Gospel as proclaimed in that church. Now and again, by way of change, a curate officiated, who, in Gregorian tones, chanted "God be merciful to us mis—er—a—bub—ble sinners;" this, however, was soon stopped by the complaints of the worshippers, who declared that if they could not be *low*, they would rather be *broad* than high church, after which ebullition of feeling, the curate, who was the rector's nephew, always took his place in the pew instead of in the pulpit when visiting his uncle. To me the only redeeming feature was the grand and masterly rendering of the psalms and hymns which led our devotions.

Long letters from home occasionally relieved the tediousness of my school days, and in this way, with the usual holidays spent at home, passed four years of my life. Then I returned home with my love for Miss Shelton increased a hundred fold, and my first impressions of Miss Ellen confirmed by a vehement and reciprocal hatred.

CHAPTER IV.

MY heart was filled with a great joy when I again took up my abode in our peaceful dwelling. I gave it an outlet in many fanciful poems and ideal sketches which were concealed in a portfolio for my perusal only. Lately I have re-read some of them, and while so employed an odd sort of pity has arisen in my heart and vented itself in tears. Tears not of sorrow—ah! no, but of mingled regret and joy—regret that the rosy light o'erspreading them so quickly faded into the grey twilight, that the sun in his glory so soon sank behind the western horizon; joy that even in the twilight there is a great and peaceful calm. Though the sun has set, the stars have arisen, and "the night is holy." Soon after my return, Ralph, who had been at college for two years, came home, to enjoy a brief holiday before entering upon the "battle of life." He told me one day when we were enjoying a quiet chat, that when he took leave of his college life and friends, his heart was swelling with conflicting emotions of so painful a nature, that they were only alleviated by the hope of emblazoning his name in the annals of his country. Ah! those bright youthful hopes: how they buoy the spirit up. Young men take their places in the great arena of life, to wrestle for the victor's laurels, to find on the field of strife more able and intellectual competitors than they forcing them to strive unflinchingly to gain even standing ground. Well it is that their hearts beat high with anticipa-

tion, and that the fire and energy of youth are brought into play during the intensity of the struggle. If it were not so the number of sad and prematurely-aged men would be appallingly increased. Fathers, if your sons are picturing bright futures, never to be realized; if they are glorying in their belief in the good faith and honesty of the human race; do not dash the brightness from their young hopeful lives by telling them how bitter and deceitful a thing life may become. Do not preach to them that the world and its friendship is a delusion, and its love a hollow dream. Tell them not that hypocrisy and treachery are stalking round every house. Be sure they will find it out soon enough. Let them believe in the "World and his wife," until experience teaches them that "Things are not what they seem."

Fred was still at College. Sunshine was at home—a beautiful blooming maiden. The bud of her childish loveliness had ripened into exquisite perfection, and even Tom had relinquished all claim to babyhood, as he strutted about the house on his father's stick, or rode, in high glee, to "Banbury Cross," upon the balustrades; and, with inquiring mind on knowledge bent, cultivated a tolerably close acquaintance with Martha, the cook, in order that the preserves and various eatables concocted by her might receive his approbation, previous to being submitted to the tastes of the family at table.

My step-mother treated me kindly, and though no outward manifestations of affection took place in our intercourse, I became conscious of a steady growth of esteem and respect for her, which increased as I witnessed her devotion to my much-loved father. But Ralph was my companion and friend—idolized and loved as only a sister can love a true and noble brother. We used to stray away into Beechfield

Woods, talking and reading until the days literally flew by. I never see a volume of "Oberon" that does not, with magical rapidity, take me back to the days when I learnt its beauty under the spell of his voice. "Burns" and "The Beauties of Paley" are also indissolubly associated with the memory of those happy days; and in the rippling poetry of the one, and the philosophy of the other, I hear again the murmuring summer breezes rustling the leaves of the spreading trees under which we perused the different volumes, and to my imaginative ear the ring of his voice sounds in every flowing rhythm and metre.

My parents were Wesleyans, and after we had been at home a month, a young minister came to Enderfield, to assist our stated Circuit Ministers in the discharge of their heavy and important duties. The failing health of the Superintendent Minister rendered it impossible for him to faithfully perform the obligations devolving upon him without such assistance, and accordingly the Rev. Octavius Haddington was appointed by the Conference to meet the increasing demands of the Circuit. He proved to be the son of an old school friend of my father's, and soon he became an almost daily visitor at our house, and joined Ralph and me in our readings until Ralph left us and went to London—a briefless barrister, full of ambitious hopes and plans for the future. Then he took my brother's place, and became my companion in my walks. I candidly confess that at first I thought he was allured to our house by the wonderful beauty of my *petite* sister Sunshine, until I noticed that he almost always addressed her in the sportive, playful manner one would use to a petted child; so I altered my opinion and arrived at the conclusion that he came to enjoy

the readings. Now that I have ceased to care for the petty vanities and adulations of the world, I surely shall not be accused of egotism in the matter, when I state that in those days I was an excellent reader; so I often read aloud, with Mr. Haddington as my sole listener. Sometimes I worked whilst he read to me, and into many dainty pieces of needlework old legends and wondrous air castles were woven with the stitches, until I dimly felt that "A double life is this of ours, a twofold form wherein we dwell"—one being the every day life with its round of duties, and the other the ideal and glorious one, created and peopled by our own imagination. Wordsworth's Poems and Sir Walter Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel" were read and re-read, until I was intimately acquainted with almost every passage in them. Mr. Haddington was quite as passionate a lover of literature as I, but his love of the characters portrayed by able pens stimulated him to greater diligence and nobler life, while mine drugged me with the imaginative, till I lost all interest in the real and existing. However, his advice and companionship roused within me a small degree of sympathy with, and interest in, my fellow creatures. His earnest persuasions induced me to become a teacher in the Sabbath school, and, though I was not a Christian, I often experienced an ardent, longing desire for the holy Christian life; but I felt great reticence on the subject, and avoided any mention of it. From one class of work I went to another, taking an interest in cottage prayer meetings and the visiting of the sick poor in our neighbourhood, ministering to their temporal needs, while Mr. Haddington ministered to their spiritual necessities. This drew us closer together. Every day he, Sunshine, and I were

together, planning some fresh work, reading some new book, or singing quaint old ballads and never-failing hymns. Sometimes he and Sunshine would talk of the wondrous love of Christ, and of the full satisfaction to be found in His service. Once I remember Sunshine said that "None but God could satisfy a woman's heart," and I pondered over her words, wondering if His love could ever satisfy my yearning soul, or stay the vague and undefined craving and restlessness that so often possessed me. True I believed in Christ. I knew that He was born in Bethlehem, that He was the subject of inconceivable sorrow when, in the bitterness of His anguish, He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, and that no human heart could ever comprehend the intensity of the feeling of desolation which prompted the cry, "Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani;" but I did not believe in Him with my heart, to the saving of my soul. My knowledge of Him was only head knowledge, and failed to affect my life and conduct. In this way matters went on for some length of time. Then I discovered that Mr. Haddington loved me, and with a coquetry as unprincipled as it was sinful, I encouraged in him a feeling which I knew that I could never reciprocate. I know not why I acted as I did, unless it was to prove my power to wound the generous heart of one who was so good and true, that I have often wondered since that the deed was not stayed by a higher power than mine. We had for a long time ceased to call each other by any but our Christian names. To me he was always "Octavius," and to him I was "Maggie" or "Pearl," a pet name bestowed on me by Ralph, and all our friends and acquaintances imagined us engaged; and, indeed, in everything but the name it was so. We never "spooned" or "gushed" in the interesting way lovers are now supposed

to do, but he treated me with a chivalry worthy of a better object and a disinterestedness of motive rarely equalled. I was proud of him as a friend, and did not wish to lose his companionship, so I skilfully warded off the proposal, which I felt would be fatal to our friendship. Sunshine took it for granted that all was right between us, and in her innocent, confiding way, looked up into my face with her wistful blue eyes, as she professed to scold me for being so much away from her. Poor little darling! she seemed to be wasting away; she had grown so miserably thin. This I attributed to the intense heat of the summer, which had tried her greatly, and comforted myself with the thought that the cooler weather would bring with it increasing health and vigour to her frame. But ere long I discovered that it was not the weather that was trying my brave little sister, and robbing her cheek of its delicate rose bloom, but a grief sore and wasting, yet infinitely less terrible than was my remorse when I at last discovered the cause of it. We were sitting one evening in our own room. She was in her favourite position at my feet, with her pretty golden head resting upon my knee. I had unbound my hair, and it had fallen in all its wealth over my shoulders, and she was reaching up her hand to caress it, her face upturned to mine, when the sound of footsteps leaving father's study broke the silence. As they proceeded toward the hall door, Sunshine's face crimsoned, and for one moment it was lit by a blaze of light which was almost as vivid, and passed away as swiftly as a flash of lightning; then it became deathly pale. Seeing that I observed her agitation, she said, "I was so startled, Maggie; I thought we were in the house alone. Didn't you?" But the lips that said it quivered so much, that I

felt the first throe of pain and remorse for my great sin. The cause of her illness flashed upon me then. She loved Octavius. And I, her sister, had encouraged the attentions of a man whom I did not love, and who was beloved by my sister.

I did not tell her that I had discovered her secret; it seemed sacrilege to speak to one so pure of the sinfulness of which I had been guilty. Yet I longed to do so, and to assure her that I did not love him, buoying her up with hope of what the future might bring. But I dared not reveal to her gaze the insincerity and blackness of my conduct, and for the first time I scorned and despised myself as a heartless, unprincipled girl, who had sacrificed the happiness of another at the shrine of a reckless vanity—obtaining a man's love on false pretences, only to spurn it as a worthless thing. As soon as possible I left Sunshine, and escaped to my bedroom, but had scarcely closed the door, when I heard my father call me. My agitation was so great that my heart almost stood still, for I felt sure that I must have been the subject of conversation in the study, and that it was on that account my father had called me. However, I replied that I would come in a minute or two, and with trembling fingers proceeded to arrange my hair. This accomplished, I walked slowly down stairs, the subject of emotions so varied as to baffle description. To my great relief my father's face shewed no sign of anything unusual having occurred. He merely gave me the monthly periodicals he was in the habit of procuring for the perusal of Sunshine and myself, remarking that "there was a capital article in 'Blackwood,' and some very good reading in 'Macmillan.'" But as I was leaving the room, he called me back, and, kissing me with

grave tenderness, he said, "God bless you, Maggie. When you leave your father for a new home and new ties, may your life be a useful and a happy one." Of course I perfectly understood what he referred to, and knew also how he would despise and condemn my conduct when he knew all. Tears, half of anger and half of shame, filled my eyes, and hot blushes crimsoned my face, as I passionately exclaimed that I never should leave him or my dear bonnie old home, and then I rushed away to my own room once more, and locking myself in, gave way to a paroxysm of violent weeping that completely exhausted me without in the slightest degree relieving the weight at my heart. When Sunshine came up to tell me that supper was waiting, I excused myself from going down on the plea of a severe head-ache, requesting her not to come up to me again, because I was going to bed immediately, and did not wish to be disturbed; she looked rather surprised, but, kissing me, said "Good night," and went softly downstairs. I was soon in bed, and resolving to end all on the morrow by confessing my dishonourable behaviour, I presently fell asleep.

CHAPTER V.

ALMOST immediately after breakfast the next morning, Mr. Haddington called and asked me to accompany him to see the plans of some new schools about to be erected in the neighbourhood. I wished I could make some excuse for refusing to go, but could think of none, so in a few moments we were wending our way together toward the village.

As we passed through the garden, I plucked a spray of heliotrope. With what marvellous distinctness each trivial action stands out on the foreground of a painful or momentous era in our existence. Even now the faintest perfume of that flower recalls with startling vividness a train of bitter experiences, over which I fain would say, "Ashes to to ashes, and dust to dust."

We sauntered slowly along, and I commenced nervously destroying the flower I held in my hand, when Mr. Haddington asked me to give it to him. In mere bravado I refused. I do not even now comprehend the mood which possessed me that morning, so defiantly wilful, yet so keenly remorseful. I longed to laugh or scream, in order to give an outlet to my bitter recklessness of spirit. Looking in my face with an expression of unutterable tenderness in his deep blue eyes, he repeated the request that I would give him the flower, adding, "I will treasure it for the donor's sake." With a light, scornful laugh I half tossed it to him, remarking as I did so that it was a womanish trick to treasure a flower.

The words had scarcely passed my lips, ere both my hands were imprisoned in his firm grasp, and he was imploring me to tell him why I always contrived to turn aside every effort he made to speak to me of his love. Then, in a burst of passionate eloquence, he said "Oh! Maggie, listen to me. I have never loved before as I now love you, and I want my loved one for my very own. My darling, I shall never be content till I call you wife. I spoke to your father last night, and he told me that he loves us both far too well to impede our happiness by any selfish desire to keep his daughter a little longer with him, and bade me plead my cause with you. Look up, my Pearl, and let me take my first kiss."

Heaven be pitiful to any girl who feels as degraded and conscience stricken as I felt while listening to his passionate pleading. I wished the earth would open and hide me from view as I stood there, saying no word in reply, and not daring to look at him for very shame. Again he pleaded, "Maggie, do speak to me. Let me know that I have not been mistaken in supposing my love returned." Then I raised my head; something in the expression of my face must surely have told its own tale, for his face blanched, and his lips perceptibly quivered, as, in tones half incredulous and full of pain, he exclaimed, "Pearl, don't you love me?" I whispered, "No," and then in a torrent of words implored his forgiveness for my heartless conduct.

The keenest pain a woman can inflict upon herself is the bitter humiliation following conduct such as mine—conduct that rubs off the exquisite bloom of girlish innocence, which, like the delicate bloom of the peach, is easily destroyed, but can never be replaced.

It was some time ere Mr. Haddington fully comprehended

the true state of my feelings. When at last he did so, he quietly left me with the assurance that no one should ever know of the cruel wrong which he had suffered at my hands. Could anyone know? Could language explain it? Put my conduct in its worst light, paint it in the very darkest colours, yet neither will convey any adequate idea of the wrong done to a true, high-minded man by false representations of friendship and love, when he finds that the being upon whom he has lavished a wealth of tenderness untold, whose words have been enshrined in his memory as "apples of gold in pictures of silver," is nothing better than a whited sepulchre. The attempt to define such a wrong would prove as futile as the attempt to count the grains of sand upon the seashore, or number the leaves of a gigantic oak as they rustle in the summer breeze. As I was returning home, Sunshine met me. On finding that she only received very irrelevant replies to her merry chatter, she declared it as her firm conviction that I was grieving because Octavius was not with me, with many other playful speeches of like import, until I could endure it no longer; so telling her that I had something of importance to communicate when we reached home I begged her not to talk to me any more till then. Seeing that I was really in earnest, she ceased her chattering, and walked quietly beside me until we reached the paddock nearest to our house. Then I told her to go in-doors, promising to follow her in a few minutes. Smiling in her pretty winsome way, she kissed me, and calling me "a dear cross old thing," left me to my own miserable reflections. After the lapse of about half-an-hour I followed her into the house, feeling very like a naughty tired child who had grieved her parents, and knew her punishment was yet to come.

First I went to my father's study, and told him the whole truth, withholding no part, and pleading no extenuating circumstances. I picture him now as he stood before me then —a perfect type of manly character, his brow o'ershadowed with grief at the story I had been telling him. And I see the contraction of his mouth as he steadied his voice, and said, "I could have borne anything better than dishonour, Margaret; but, still, better dishonour now than that you should have found out when too late what it is to be tied to a man whom you do not love. Oh! that a daughter of mine should ever have acted as you have acted! It is almost more than I can bear." Saying nothing in reply—what could I say?—I left the room. Then I went to Sunshine and gently told her. Never shall I forget her grief. At first she positively shrank from me, as though I had been a murderess. But her tender, loving nature could not long withstand my tears, so presently she came and sat beside me, and, mingling her tears with mine, listened to my plaint. For several days after this I imagined the bearing of each member of the family toward me so altered that I almost expected even Tom to taunt me with my lack of true principle.

The bitterest drop in the cup of humiliation of which I was drinking so deeply was a letter from my dear brother Ralph, in which he indignantly remonstrated with me for what he termed "my dastardly treatment of so true a man." By the same post I received a long loving letter from Eva Chester, containing a pressing invitation to spend a few weeks with them in Dublin.

Miserable as I was, and yearning to escape for a time from the scene of so much unpleasantness and worry, this invitation seemed most opportune. Without much difficulty,

I obtained my father's permission to accept it, and wrote to Eva by the next post, promising to be with her towards the end of the following week. My father, with his characteristic kindness and consideration, arranged that Ralph should leave his chambers in the Temple for a few days, and escort me as far as Holyhead, see me safely on the boat *en route* for Dublin, and then return to his duties once more. So in the course of a few days Ralph was in his old place at my side, the past condoned, and our sweet intercourse again renewed — as far as was compatible with packing and adieux.

Once fairly started on our journey, Ralph proposed to make it a sight-seeing one, deciding to stop for a short time at every town where there was anything worth staying for. We spent one day in the city of Winchester, visiting the grand old Cathedral, in which are interred the remains of several Saxon Kings and Queens. From thence we passed on to Basingstoke. Nothing worthy of note claiming our attention there, we proceeded to Reading, and from thence to Chester, where we passed a Sunday. On the Sunday morning Ralph was suffering from a severe headache, which necessitated our remaining in the house, but in the afternoon we attended the four o'clock service in the fine Cathedral of St. Werburgh. The solemn hush of the place, and the beautiful impressive service, quieted and calmed my spirit, as a mother's lullaby soothes her infant. The antiquity and beauty of the architecture (the Cathedral was built by Hugh Lupus, the nephew of William the Conqueror) elicited enthusiastic admiration from Ralph, and I thought he would never tire of looking at it. When the service was concluded, and the congregation dismissed, we

left the Cathedral, and enjoyed a walk upon the City walls, which Ralph told me were built (in part) by the Romans. The old quaint-looking houses, with their singular fronts—many of them resting upon three upright beams of timber, and extending to the edge of the pathway and the old walls (from which are attainable splendid views of Wales in the distance)—together with many other relics of the past, make Chester a place almost unique in its attractiveness to the antiquarian. Ralph's enjoyment of the few days we passed there seemed almost perfect, and when on Thursday morning we left for Holyhead, he was evidently sorry to do so. In a few hours I found myself on board the boat, bound for Dublin, and Ralph was speeding away as fast as steam could carry him, to London. After a very rough passage across the Channel, we glided into the Bay of Dublin (which, I may say, *en passant*, is almost as beautiful as the far-famed Bay of Naples) and I was soon clasped in the warm embrace of my friend, Eva.

In the inner circle of our affections—where only they stand who have passed the various testing stages of acquaintance-ship, esteem, friendship, and love—there is, and ought to be, the minimum amount of change on earth. Through these testing stages Eva had passed, and my heart went out to her in exactly the same way as it did in our schooldays, when we shared the same bed and board. Cherished in the centre of my heart, love for her grew—a love never to be unrooted, never to die, even with my latest breath. Eva was one who, when absent from me, continually rose up in the chamber of my thoughts, ever fresh and refreshing as the perfume of some rare eastern otto. And when present with me she enchained me as with a spell that was like a foretaste of

angelic fellowship and love. A passionate admiration of her beauty of person and character mingled with my love. No woman who has loved one of her own sex as I loved Eva will deny the fact that true friendship 'twixt woman and woman is one of the purest types of love, free, as it is, from all guile, partaking, as it does, of the nature of love more divine than human. Away with the cant called love which lives on perfumed notes and endearing epithets, counting position more than love, and wealth more than worth! Give me the love that will clasp hands with poverty if the spirit responds unto its own; bestow on me the love that "many waters cannot quench"—full of holy fire and dauntless ardour. No milk-and-water friendship can satisfy a woman's heart. Compliments and flattery may appease its hungry cries for a time, but eventually it will assert itself and yearn for *love*, and the nearest approach to satisfaction which it attains is the possession of love such as one woman can give to another whom she intuitively admires. Woman's love is strong for patient long-suffering, strong for calm endurance, strong in the charity that "thinketh no evil;" and her true love, once given, never changes, unless her spirit is broken and her confidence shaken by the person to whom she has given that love.

In a very short time we reached Eva's home. Her father gave me a truly Irish welcome—for hospitality commend me to the Irish—and Minnie also professed to be glad to see me, and was profuse in her compliments regarding my improved appearance, indulging in small rhapsodies over the length and colour of my hair. Having arrived in good time for breakfast, I was soon assembled with the others around the family table, when I was introduced to Mr. John Chester, Eva's

eldest brother. He apologised for not having accompanied Eva to meet me at the boat, excusing his non-appearance on the ground of special and pressing business engagements, which had rendered his coming impossible.

Let me describe him as he first appeared to me. He was tall and well built, with a frank, open face, full of fun and mirth. His eyes were large and dark, and perfectly beautiful in their clear expression, and he had an earnest, well-set mouth, firm, and yet pleasing. He looked like a man in whose vocabulary "impossible" and "I can't" had never found a place. He soon won my deep admiration by his gentlemanly bearing and courteous treatment. He was always as chivalrous to his sisters as he was to strangers; a certain index to a man's character is his bearing towards his relatives; and he who cannot stand this test is unworthy of the name.

CHAPTER VI.

THE day following my arrival we started upon one of a series of sight-seeing expeditions, and in this way days glided into weeks, which literally flew over our heads. We had visited almost every place of interest in Dublin; I had revelled in the indescribable beauty of County Wicklow, and enjoyed excursions to and picnics in all the most romantic spots in it, when one morning at breakfast Mr. Chester proposed that I should write and ask Ralph and Fred to join us for a week or two, previous to my return home. This I did. Ralph accepted the invitation, but Fred declined it in a few expressive words, declaring that "a lack of the needful will not permit of my accepting Mr. Chester's very kind invitation."

Ralph was soon with us, and my happiness seemed as bright and beautiful as a summer's day. Yet I saw very little of him, excepting at table. He and Minnie Chester were always together, gathering ferns and conversing on botany, singing together, or talking upon some subject interesting to them only. It never once entered my thoughts that anything of more moment than friendship would spring from their companionship. I forgot that Minnie was lovely in the extreme; that she possessed a sweet liquid voice, and large violet eyes of witching loveliness, shaded by long dark lashes, that at times swept her cheeks as though kissing their soft bloom. I was also blind to the fact, patent to all the rest,

that Ralph watched her and waited upon her with the most chivalrous devotion, and was showing by a thousand delicate attentions how completely she enthralled his heart. One morning I was sitting alone in the library with a volume of "Curiosities of Literature" in my hand, reading "Poetical and Grammatical Deaths," lazily wondering whether I could compose an epitaph upon myself while dying, and I was stringing a number of lines together in a fashion peculiarly my own, when Ralph entered the room. He had an open letter in his hand, which he gave to me, saying, "What a nuisance that is! He always seems to require somebody to govern him." I read the letter, which was from Fred, and as it tells its own story better than I can tell it, you shall read it too:—"I'm nearly out of 'tin' again, and the *pater* won't listen to any excuses, neither will he give me any of the needful. But that's not the worst part; I owe about fifty pounds, and can't find the wherewithal to pay it, unless he forks it out. So do come home, like a dear old boy, or I shall soon be on my beam ends, and have to raise a supply, and then take Her Majesty's shilling. I should rather like the latter part of the business, uniform of any description looks well, and as I'm growing quite a young giant, they would be only too glad to secure my services as an ornament to the regiment." I finished the letter, which contained a good deal more of the same sort of nonsense, and then said to Ralph, "You must go, dear." "Do you think I really must?" he replied. I answered "Yes, certainly; or Fred will do something hastily that will cause him and us a life long repentance; he is so impulsive. If I were you, I would make my excuses to Mr. Chester, and start for home to-day." "Oh, no! I cannot go till to-morrow," he exclaimed

"I must wait over this evening, for I cannot leave here without knowing whether Minnie loves me or not." If the house had fallen, or one of the old pictures upon the library wall stepped from its frame, it could not have startled me more than his words did. He evidently did not perceive their effect, and for nearly an hour I sat there listening to the expression of his rapturous admiration of her eyes, her golden hair, her singing, her beautiful face, and, as he termed it "her lovely spirit." It was soon very plain to me that he had conceived for her the love that some noble natures have for a woman. A passionate affection that gilds and beautifies their very faults, making them fair and winning. Oh! when men love in this way, and raise the beautiful structure of their love upon an insecure foundation, how terrible is its downfall! How pitiful the shaking of the clay idol which they fondly imagined was of "gold seven times purified!" How I hoped that such might not be Ralph's experience. Love, I argued, might change Minnie's nature, as it often does that of a woman, and make her more tender and true to *all*. Are not our actions the index of our feelings, throwing the reflex of our joys and sorrows upon our friends and associates? So, in this case, I tried to hope that when Minnie knew the perfectly noble character of her lover, she would receive his love as a partial revelation of the higher life which she might live if once she threw from her the garment of selfishness in which she was so closely enveloped. It appeared strange to me that Ralph, with his own innate carefulness and thoughtfulness for others, should have failed to perceive that self was the idol which Minnie worshipped. But I think the purity of motive which prompted all my brother's actions was in itself a safeguard to him against the detection

of mean or dishonourable motives in others. That night Ralph brought his betrothed to receive a sister's kiss from me. Let me be just to Minnie. No woman is wholly bad, however much deeply rooted evil may warp the germ of goodness in her nature. There is always some chord in the human heart that will throb and respond to the magical touch of love. Oh! human heart! most wonderful in thy mechanism, why is not nobility thine heritage, and purity thy birthright? That evening I watched Minnie as she sat beside my brother, and was constrained to believe that she loved him; that is, as far as a shallow nature like hers would permit her. Of course there was a protest against Ralph's leaving so soon; but in vain, so with the exception of John Chester and myself, who purposed accompanying him to the station in the morning, all said, "Good-night!" and "Good-bye!" at the same time, and we retired to our apartments. Sitting in my quiet little room, I found myself wondering that Minnie had not proposed accompanying us in the morning, and picturing in rather a vague way, my probable line of conduct under similar circumstances, thinking how I would have arisen, and, taking "a riband or a rose," to make myself fair for the eyes that loved me, have claimed the last farewell for myself. Then my thoughts centred themselves more completely on my Ralph. Did it strike me as strange that I should always apply the possessive pronoun to his name, and that soon it would be another woman's right to do so and not mine? I think it did, for hot tears rushed to my eyes, and a choking sensation arose in my throat. Every sister knows what the sense of pain and desolation is when another woman takes her place. If her substitute is a woman "worthy to be loved," her tears are like April

showers, swift to pass away, leaving the sun shining even more brightly than before; but when the woman of her brother's choice is unworthy of his love, then her tears resemble a winter tempest, fierce and fearful in its results.

If it had only been Eva, with her open-handed generosity, her loving spirit and Christian life, whom Ralph had loved, how differently I should have viewed their engagement. What a fitting companion she would have been for him. How long I sat musing thus I know not, but it must have been for hours, ere—remembering that I should have to rise early in the morning—I abandoned waking dreams for those of slumber. The next morning, at parting, Ralph wrung my hand, and imprinting upon my lips one of his much-prized kisses, he said, "Look after my treasure, won't you, Pearl? In a week or two more I shall fetch you home." Then, as if noticing my plain appearance for the first time, he said, "You want plenty of fresh air, or something of the sort, to give you some roses, and brighten your dear sombre face." Was it happiness that made him so tender over me, and caused him to call me by my old pet name? I think it was. I like to think that he enjoyed a draught of perfect bliss out of the cup that afterwards yielded him so much bitterness. He and John Chester parted in right brotherly fashion. When we had caught the last glimpse of Ralph, John offered me his arm, and we quietly strolled homewards, choosing the longest way thither. I am glad that my natural out-let of fun and my flow of animal spirits were never restrained in the society of John Chester, although by his conversation and bearing I was half awed into a consistency of behaviour quite remarkable in a person of my passionate, impulsive temperament. Towards him I already had a feeling of con-

fidence and a sense of security in his judgment, so I told him about Fred. He greatly cheered and relieved me by the assurance that "most boys go to the end of their tether before they learn that to be firm against evil is a truer test of manhood than the lavish expenditure of money which is not theirs." I consoled myself with the idea that it would be all right with Fred, and entered the house feeling much more hopeful than when I left it an hour previously. As I took my seat at the breakfast table, I was pleasantly surprised to see a letter addressed in Sunshine's familiar handwriting, and eagerly tore open the envelope, and commenced its perusal. "Papa desires you and Ralph to return at once to Enderfield," she wrote, "and mamma has been talking to me this morning about the expenses of our wardrobes. She says papa has been complaining about the length of our draper's bill this quarter. Of course, mamma allows that it is her fault, and not ours, as she had always purchased everything for us, but she says we must economize. What can be the meaning of it all? I have never once heard papa speak of such a thing before. Mamma says that when she asked him for money to pay Martha and Jane their wages, he said we should have to make one servant do, especially as we had a woman to clean on Fridays and Saturdays. Poor mamma came to me and cried bitterly, but I think it was because papa had spoken so abruptly about what he termed 'the unnecessary expenditure.' He utterly refuses to help Fred, declaring that he must find his own way out of his self-imposed troubles. I think that somehow or other he *has* found a way out of them, for he left here yesterday, refusing to tell where he obtained the money to defray his travelling expenses, for we knew he

did not possess any money on the previous morning. However, I have my own ideas about it. I believe he has told a piteous tale to Mr. Haddington, and borrowed the money from him. He (Mr. Haddington) called yesterday morning, and was inquiring after Ralph and you. Just at present he is throwing his whole energy into the work of raising cash for the new schools, and is working very hard. Papa told him that he was looking overworked and troubled, at which he smiled, and answered that work was the panacea for all the ills to which the flesh is heir, and that he didn't believe there was any trouble in the world which hard work would not alleviate, and eventually cure."

Not knowing how I could return to Enderfield without Ralph, I determined to wait till I received a letter from him. It soon came. He said I had better try and travel alone, as several monetary affairs of ours required his close attention, and would require it for two months at least, so I decided to pack and start with the least possible delay. Mr. Chester, in his fatherly way, insisted that John should accompany me as far as Birkenhead, (I was returning *viâ* Liverpool), and also extracted a promise from me to spend the following spring with them.

CHAPTER VII.

"I sat in the school of sorrow:
The Master was teaching me there,
But my eyes were dim with weeping,
And my heart was full of care.

"Instead of looking upward,
And seeing His face divine,
So full of tender pity
For weary hearts like mine,

"I only thought of the burden,
The cross that before me lay,
So hard and heavy to carry,
It darkened the light of day."

WHEN I arrived at home it seemed so utterly unlike the home which I had left a month or two previously that I was quite startled. Even Tom wore a subdued expression on his face, as though his usually boisterous spirits had received several salutary checks. My step-mother looked extremely sad and careworn, and darling Sunshine, smiling as sweetly as ever, looked painfully white and frail. But the greatest perceptible difference was in Ralph. I could not have believed it possible that a few days could have wrought such a change in him, he appeared so utterly wearied and worn out. Papa reminded me of a noble oak bereft by some fierce storm of all its majestic beauty, and left a complete wreck. The cause of all this was soon explained to me. My father derived his income from

a large mercantile concern in Buenos Ayres, in which he had invested the whole of his capital. Being one of the sleeping partners, and having regularly received a fair dividend of the profits, he had never troubled himself to examine into the working of the firm. Some six months previous to my visit to Ireland, he heard that one of the partners was living in princely style, spending fabulous sums of money upon works of art, and entertaining the *élite* of society, with a total disregard of cost. When this news reached Enderfield, my father, bent upon discovering whether it was true or not, wrote to some old friends of his who were residing at Buenos Ayres, asking them to furnish him with the facts of the case. Through some remark inadvertently made by this friend in his hearing, the dishonest partner concluded that his day was over, so, taking all the cash which he could lay hands on, he absconded. This was the cause of the woe-begone looks which met my view on my return home. There was another partner in this sad business—a Mr. Buchanan. For several years he had resided in South America, and watched the working of the concern. Then, being satisfied that Mr. Stephens (the defaulter) was true to his trust, he had returned to England, and settled in North Lancashire, where he had been living for five years or more. I shall never forget his haggard face, as he and my father went over the accounts, a copy of which had been forwarded by the creditors. Presently my father said, in a hard dry voice, "Utter ruin!" Mr. Buchanan echoed his words, and then, burying his face in his hands upon the table, sobbed aloud. Pitiful, indeed, are sobs from a man! As I saw his frame convulsed with the effort to restrain them, I realized for the first time how heartrending grief can be, even to men. Poor old man! It

was not for his own loss the tears fell, but for the sake of his children—his son in the morning of life, and his fair young daughter, who was dearer to him than the apple of his eye. Oh, Sin, thy serpent trail mars every Eden, and blasts or overshadows every earthly joy! We gathered together in the study that night, a sorrowful group, and after quietly talking everything over, ultimately decided that Ralph should go to America at once, and endeavour to settle affairs in some measure at least. Did he (Ralph) let his mind dwell on the fact that henceforth for him earth would be a place of toil—that work would be bread, and bread work? No, unselfish as ever, his first thought was for others, and smiling, he tried to cheer us, saying, "Both Fred and I must get clerkships as soon as I return home again, until something better turns up. My profession will be of very little use to me for several years to come, so it must go; but working together, we can hardly fail to be comparatively happy." It never crossed his mind that papa should think of working after his years of easy life, and when papa proposed it, Ralph exclaimed, "That shall never be."

Long after the rest had retired for the night, Ralph and I remained in the study, laying plans for the future. Mine were soon made. If we had to leave Enderfield, I decided I would go out as a governess. I am glad that at the outset I did not realize what poverty meant; I did not know how bitter a thing it would be to look at a sovereign with a view to planning to get thirty shillings' worth out of it, if possible. I knew nothing, then, of the dresses turned and re-turned, of gloves mended and mended again, and garments patched and repaired until the original texture was almost a matter for faith, it was so very dimly visible;

of things once deemed necessary becoming luxuries rarely attainable, and, above all, the weary dread lest the expenditure should exceed the income. Thank God! I knew nothing of all this, then. I really believe that, on the whole, the idea of being poor was not particularly objectionable to me. I indulged in dreams and visions in which my works praised me "in the gates," and entertained vague ideas on the subject of exhibiting my own drawings, in which I egotistically imagined I excelled, thinking thereby to realise fame and wealth, and buy back Enderfield; there to live, as novelists put it, "happy ever after." Personally, I am not sorry that these hopeful dreams are essentially the possession of the young. The rosy hues they cast over the sombre side of life are like the rays of a heaven-born light dispelling the gloom of our declining days. Now that I have long since passed the milestone of youth, I look back upon the road behind me very much in the same way as a traveller would look back upon the early stages of a long journey, with a smile at the thought of the interest which he took in the pleasant and varied scenes through which he had been travelling; but after a while the freshness and beauty lost their charms for him, and he longed for the end of his journey. He does not say that the pleasure never existed because it has now ceased to be. No; he treasures the memory of it, and occasionally brings it to remembrance. So, though the freshness of life belongs not to age, we dare not assert the non-existence of such freshness. Oh, lost youth, fair as the ethereal loveliness of spring, beautiful as a dream, rare by reason of thy irrecoverable brightness, thou art lovely in thy radiantly-tinted promises of future splendour. But they in due time give place to the more subdued beauty of the golden autumnal

tints that are sure heralds of the winter which ends when God giveth his beloved sleep.

Little did I know what a hand-to-hand struggle life often is, and how unsuccessful genius fails to secure recognition, while gilded folly ofttimes receives laudation.

The following week Ralph started for America; and the newness of our grief past, we settled down somewhat after our ordinary fashion, excepting that Martha was discharged on the score of economy, and Jane and I cooked the dinners and did the household work. It was at that time I first realised what it was to *live*. I liked to feel that others were dependent upon me for help and comfort. I am certain the various dishes that I contrived and furnished for the table were to me daintier far than Martha's most skilful productions. I liked, too, to feel tired when the day's duties were over. It was the earnest of the life that lay stretched before me, though I knew it not then—a foretaste of the days when weariness indescribable was my portion, and I vainly longed to lay my burden down and die.

Was it weak and childish of me to picture success as the sure reward of patient work? Perhaps it was; but my happy thoughts exercised such a cheering influence upon me, that I do not regret having entertained them.

Ralph, true and considerate son that he was, wrote immediately upon reaching his destination; and while telling us the worst, lessened the magnitude of our loss by his tender love, and by hopeful schemes for the future. I remember reading his letter and kissing the loved handwriting, as I saw the bright sketch he had made of the life that lay before us, and when my father's face brightened at its perusal, I involuntarily exclaimed, "Was there ever brother like mine?"

Mr. Haddington called several times. Upon one occasion he said to me, "Miss Munro, if ever you require a friend, I pray you will not hesitate to come to me." A friend he was indeed; his very presence gave my father comfort.

During this time of trial no one seemed to think of writing to Fred, although we knew it would be necessary for him to leave College at the expiration of the term. We were soon compelled to think of him, for Dr. Ferguson wrote to papa, inquiring as to the reason of Fred's prolonged absence, and the consequent neglect of his studies. How my poor father's hands trembled as he held the letter, and how completely every thought of our poverty vanished in the presence of this new and terrible grief, so terrible that it would be worse than useless to attempt to pourtray it here. Had Fred met with an accident? Had the rash boy put an end to his life? With startling rapidity question after question of this kind rushed through my mind. After a moment's consideration, however, they were one and all dismissed, for had anything of the kind happened, we must have heard of it ere then. But where could he be, our light-hearted, laughter-loving boy? My father started by the first train that left for Oxford, after the news reached us, and we, half distracted, remained at home, to await the reception of any information which he might succeed in obtaining. Oh, the sickening suspense of waiting for tidings of a loved one, when day after day closes with the same sad story, "No news." On the morning of the third day after my father's departure, I put on my hat, and started out for a walk. The silence of the house had become quite unendurable to me, and the sight of Sunshine's white, piteous face almost drove me mad. Fred was her favourite brother, and the anguish of her mind was great. Wrapped up in my

sad reflections, to the utter oblivion of my surroundings, I walked on and on. To this day I do not know what direction I took, but towards three o'clock (I had started soon after ten o'clock), I found myself in Clifton Wood, a distance of thirteen miles from Enderfield. I was fairly startled when I first noticed my whereabouts, for I was dreadfully fatigued, and knew that it would be impossible for me to reach home before eight o'clock, walking rapidly; I could not procure a vehicle of any description, for the spot was far from all traffic. I listened intently, but no sound broke the stillness of the place, save the musical response of the forest trees to the wooing of the wind, or the hoarse croaking of a solitary toad disporting itself on the margin of a limpid stream which silently flowed beneath them. In my weary despair, I watched the toad, and actually wished that I were it. Then I began to question the wisdom and guidance of God, and to wonder why my father's lot should have been marred just when rest and comfort were most essential to him. I reasoned that he could not live many more years, and trouble would surely hasten his end. Then came thoughts of Fred. What had he done? Where was he? Why this mystery about him? Was my father, like Job, to be robbed of home, children, and all that made life enjoyable? Surely God was dealing hardly with us, sending trouble upon trouble in this way. Did He see the end from the beginning? If so, why did He let this trial visit His servant? Perhaps it was to try his faith. Should I pray for him, and ask God to help him to bear this heavy burden? "The prayers of the wicked are an abomination," whispered the wind to my imaginative ear. "It is only the prayer of the righteous that availeth; God will not listen to your petition, and even if He

does, He will only 'mock because your fear cometh.'" "Try," said the still small voice within me. And breaking away from the consciousness of self, I fell on my knees. For a long time I could only wail out, "Help me, Lord, Thou knowest all," while my tears fell thick and fast as summer rain, refreshing me, as gentle showers refresh the parched earth. When I reached home, I was exceedingly tired, but my heart was more at rest, and had in it fewer feelings of rebellion when my father's message came—"Still no news of Fred."

Weary days and weeks passed away. At last he was traced to Liverpool, from whence he had embarked for America. Would Ralph and he meet?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE next home-bound vessel brought Ralph safely to England, and soon we had him amongst us once more. At his appearance every gleam of hope that things might possibly be better than we had supposed died out. Nothing had been exaggerated! We were utterly and totally ruined! A few more weeks at the most, and the dear old home that we all loved so much, and that had been ours all our lives, would belong to someone else, and we should have to leave it and go out into the wide world to fight the battle of life, and to learn by bitter experience how hard a thing it is "to suffer and be strong."

Ralph advertised in our local paper for a clerkship and I for a situation as morning governess, and then in a weary, apathetic frame of mind we awaited results. Meanwhile, the worst came, and our home at Enderfield passed out of our possession. When the crisis arrived, my step-mother's conduct was noble and unselfish in the extreme, proving to me how utterly unfounded my childish prejudices concerning her had been. She gave up every article of jewellery and almost all her personal possessions to the creditors. We took a small house in the village of Ash-glen, some six miles from Enderfield, and thither we removed, only taking with us the most positive necessities in the shape of furniture. Then commenced a new era in our lives, in which the intrinsic value of my step-mother became still more apparent

to me. She cooked our dinners, waited with untiring patience upon my father, who was quite broken down, and worked like a housemaid to keep our small apartments neat and clean. After a lapse of some weeks, Ralph was successful in obtaining his desired employment. He went to and returned from business by rail, so we had the pleasure of his society in the evenings.

As for me, I was almost in despair. All this time had passed and not one reply to my carefully-worded advertisement, which had appeared week after week, had reached me. One morning I was sitting wondering whether I should ever receive an answer to it, when I was started from my reverie by the postman's knock. A somewhat rare occurrence his loud rat-tat at our door had been for some time past. Who has not experienced that friends who cluster round us and bask in the sunshine of our prosperity are often the very first to desert us and flee away when the storm cloud gathers? Hastily opening the door, I took the proffered missive from his hands. Perceiving that it was addressed to me, and that the handwriting was unfamiliar, my heart gave a quick throb, and I quickly tore open the envelope and proceeded to possess myself of its contents. It had come at last—the long looked-for answer. The lady who had penned it was a Mrs. Sylvester. She resided in a pretty villa called Sea View, a very short distance from our old home at Enderfield; but though we had been such near neighbours, we had never in the slightest degree cultivated her acquaintance. She requested me to call upon her on the following morning.

At the time appointed I found myself in Mrs. Sylvester's drawing-room, rather nervously awaiting her appearance. When at last she came, the impression she instantly made

on me was that she was no lady. She commenced the interview by stating that in reality she required a resident governess, but as I was evidently very poor she had decided to give me a trial. How my proud nature revolted at these words! I longed to throw them back at her, and leave the house; but the thought of Ralph restrained me. So I silently listened to what she had to say. Then she expressed a desire to see a specimen of my handwriting. So I drew off my glove, and writing my name and address upon a card, I handed it to her. She seemed perfectly satisfied with it, and offered me a salary of £30 a year, stipulating that I should impart the groundwork of a thorough English education and the rudiments of French, German, and music to the children. I was rather afraid of my grammar, for when at school I had always shown a peculiar inaptitude for that particular branch of study; but as I remarked the unconcerned way in which Mrs. Sylvester dropped her h's and then gathered them up again and tacked them to the wrong words, I told myself that I could give her children all she would require for them in the shape of education. She informed me that she expressly forbade any familiarity with the servants or with her own personal friends. Also that she would require my services in her drawing-room occasionally as pianiste. The latter requirement I refused to comply with, for I had decided to give music lessons in the afternoons. And the evenings? Well—I had a way of spending my evenings which was only known to one other beside myself. When Mrs. Sylvester discovered that I would not yield compliance in this matter, she immediately endeavoured to induce me to lower my terms, and proceeded to enumerate my accomplishments as though they had been so many bales of

goods upon which she had fixed a certain price. However, I resolutely determined to take no less than £30, and presently left the house, engaged to teach three children, at the figure of £10 each. As I crossed the hall when leaving I felt my hand moist and warm, and remembering that I had previously withdrawn my glove, I was about to put it on, but found my hand was streaked with blood, which was slowly trickling from my finger nails. In my efforts to control my feelings, and prevent an outburst of wrath, I had so clenched my hands that the blood had gushed from every finger nail. This was only the beginning. Alas! I was not made for a teacher, and my pupils, though bonnie, loving children, were high-spirited and spoilt.

No news of Fred had ever reached us; the vessel in which he was supposed to have sailed perished, and we, as did thousands of others, read through the list of those who were saved from the wreck of "The Golden Age." We looked eagerly for some name that *might* be our Fred's, but none such met our view. So we wore our mourning garments with sad and heavy hearts. How I wished that I could have pressed one kiss upon his lips before the chill waves engulfed him.

God forgive any woman who heaps upon another one the indignities which Mrs. Sylvester heaped upon me. I know that I was proud in my poverty, perhaps repellant, but I certainly did not merit the treatment which I received from her. Daily did I feel the sting of her tongue, and endure with outward calmness the lack of those little courtesies which make life so pleasant, while inwardly my blood boiled in my veins, and I registered many a vow to resent her treatment. Mr. Sylvester was a perfect gentleman, and I used to wonder how he was ever induced to marry her. The children

had one great fault; they were untruthful, and had been taught to retail everything they heard for their mamma's gratification, therefore I hardly dared to lavish upon them the love which I felt towards them. One day Mrs. S. taunted me with my proud poverty in the presence of the children: after she left the room my tears had their way, and I wept bitterly. The next morning I told one of the little girls not to chatter so much, or I would punish her, when she saucily retorted, "Then I will tell mamma, and she will make you cry again." I laid my book down, rung the bell, and when Eliza answered it, told her to ask Mrs. Sylvester if she would kindly come into the school-room for a few moments. She came; and I gave her to understand that I declined to stay any longer in her service, so hoped she would suit herself with as little delay as possible, and let me go, giving her my reason for coming to such a decision. She left the room, and a few minutes later the servant brought me an envelope, in which was enclosed a month's salary, and a cruelly-worded command to leave the house at once. I left the money upon the table, and kissing the children immediately took my departure. Upon reaching home I went straight to my own room, and sitting down, looked our position fairly in the face: Ralph was earning a hundred and fifty pounds per annum; Father was ill, perhaps dying, requiring extra care and rest and medical attendance; Sunshine was earning a few pounds by dint of hard work at copying the scribblings of a wealthy would-be author; Tom, of course, was earning nothing, and I was a governess, without a character, or the chance of getting one, and all the money I had in the world only amounted to two pounds, three shillings and eightpence. I had three music pupils, but they all lived at some distance, and almost

daily I had to trudge weary miles to be tortured by teaching notes which had long since lost their charm for me. How would it all end? We certainly could not go on much longer like this. The fact that the struggle would be of short duration became increasingly apparent. But would it end in total ruin? God help us if it did! How could we endure if separation came?—if we had to break up our home? What nights of wakefulness this thought had cost me, and now surely it was to be realized!

When we gathered round the hearth that evening, I could not speak of my trouble. Ralph's patient face, out of which the merriment had fled, filled me with remorse, and I earnestly wished that I had endured a little longer. When the others had retired, Ralph and I had a long talk. We always stayed behind to enjoy a few moments together at the close of the day. First extinguishing the light—for did it not cost money?—I seated myself on a low stool at his feet, and while his long white fingers caressed my aching brow, I told him the events of the day. He kissed me, and, strangely moved, said, "Poor darling, I did not know it had been so bad as that for my brave Pearl. However, let us hope that it will prove the turning in the lane, and that something better will come of it." My brother's very touch seemed to strengthen me, and once more I grew hopeful, and we parted for the night. But the days that followed, and the heart-sickening despair that brooded over my senses and almost maddened me, I can never forget. Such feelings never find complete oblivion, not even in the great ocean of Time, for ever and anon its waves roll over and reveal the skeleton of the dead past. I trudged weary miles, endeavouring to procure a situation. I scanned with anxious eyes the columns

of advertisements in the daily papers, but failed to secure one of the many vacancies, until I became as fretful and petulant as a spoilt child. Little did my loved ones know how cruelly the pressure of life was weighing me down.

> "My heart was hot and restless,
> And my life was full of care,
> The burden laid upon me
> Seemed greater than I could bear."

I was tossed about in a sea of doubt, and in my heart I called God cruel, and rebelled against His dealings with me and mine. I used to watch Sunshine's beautiful face, where the dark circles under her eyes told their own tale, and hate myself for in part causing her wretchedness. Oft-times when a hasty word had passed my lips she would turn away with her eyes full of tears, and then a passionate loathing of myself would take possession of me.

Father's case now became a source of deep anxiety to us. His mind was gradually losing its balance, and his appetite altogether failed him. He sorely missed the many luxuries of our old home, and for days together he would sit quiet and still. Then his mind would wander, and in fancy he lived over again the old happy days at Enderfield, addressing us as though it were a reality, instead of a mere fancy. To Ralph this was especially painful; I have seen him actually wince when my father has patted him on the back and said, "Look out for as many briefs as possible, Ralph, for I want to see you married and comfortably settled." Then father would ask all kinds of questions concerning Minnie Chester, and speak of the comforts with which Ralph would surround her, and of the treasure she would possess in having him for her husband. These attacks were followed by lucid intervals,

during which he spoke and acted with Christian fortitude and dignity, and tried to cheer us by directing our attention to the promises of God to His children.

Ralph often told me what a comfort it was to him to take all his petty cares and annoyances to Jesus. "Oh, Pearl," he would say, "you little know the peace and comfort it brings." Of these vexations he had many. His fellow clerks sneered at what they termed his ultra-refinement, and styled him "Gentleman Munro," with many a covert sneer which made his uncongenial occupation still more distasteful to him. He told me all this one night when we were walking through the town, and in so doing had passed his office. A short time after this his employers offered to transfer him to Southampton, and after due consideration, Ralph accepted the offer, as he thought that living would be less expensive there than where we then were. So in about two months more we found ourselves in that delightful town. After we had been there some weeks, Sunshine and I begged mamma and Ralph to leave the apartments which we occupied, and take a small house in one of the suburbs, and let us try to obtain a few day-scholars.

After some difficulty we succeeded in obtaining their consent, and one bright morning in early spring Sunshine and I started on an exploring expedition. What a contrast between Southampton then and now. The grand old trees in the avenue, then majestic in their beauty, were long ago removed to give place to a new stock. With what lingering tenderness I sometimes recall the memory of our first walk beneath them; the leaves were bursting forth in all their new loveliness, and the throats of the feathered songsters that fluttered amongst their branches were vibrating with

rich, sweet melody, while the cuckoo, with its lonely plaintive note, hailed the approach of summer, and purple violets peeped modestly forth from their bed of dew-bespangled leaves. I sat down in a perfect ravishment of joy, and Sunshine, sitting beside me, repeated in her low sweet voice: "My Beloved spake, and said unto me: rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth. The time of the singing of birds is at hand." Then, as if dwelling upon his love, she exclaimed, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." The joy passed from my heart, and a longing to know something more of my sister's beloved took possession of me. I looked into her face, and saw the calm joy of a satisfied heart pourtrayed upon it, and my pulse throbbed and quickened as I thought that at some future time this satisfaction might be mine also. After resting a few minutes longer, we walked on, Sunshine darting in and out among the trees like a child. She drank in all the sweetness of the glorious morning, laughing joyously as she culled a flower more beauteous than its companions, or clapping her hands in ecstacy as she discovered some choice variety of fern. Ah, my sister would never grow old, for the youth in her loving heart was born in a fairer clime, where the inhabitants number not the days nor the years. At last we found a perfect bower of a house, enshrined in a wilderness of flowers and shrubs, and Sunshine and I decided that providing Ralph did not think it too far from the town, it should be our home. The next day we procured the key, and, accompanied by him, started for the spot which we girls had selected as our future abode. It was certainly a very small house, the rooms were hardly larger than our cupboards had

been at Enderfield. Sunshine was vastly amused at the apology for a hall, as she called it, declaring that if ever we could afford to purchase a piano it would have to be brought into the house piece-meal, one key at a time. Then she commenced such a ludicrous description of the manner in which the furniture would have to be got in and disposed of when it was in, that our laughter pealed through the house. She wound up by avowing her intention to marry a poor man, try love in a cottage, and bring it to a successful termination with the song of "John Anderson, my Jo:" then, springing down the narrow stairs two steps at once, she disappeared into the garden.

In the end Ralph decided in favour of taking the house, and in a few weeks we removed thither. Sunshine and I turned upholsteresses, making carpets as though we had always been used to the work, while Mamma's time was fully occupied with attending to papa. We were seated upon the floor one morning sewing together breadths of the carpet that was intended for the little parlour, our hair dishevelled and our dresses dusty, when in walked Ralph and Mr. Haddington. Rather confusedly I started up, and uttered a few words expressive of the pleasure we felt at seeing him so unexpectedly, and then Sunshine and I beat a hasty retreat to our little bedroom to do our hair and change our dusty dresses for others more presentable. When we came down again Mr. Haddington explained the reason of his sudden appearance. It seems he had been visiting some friends in Ventnor, Isle of Wight, and passing through Southampton on his way home, had met Ralph, and yielded to his earnest persuasions to spend two or three days with us before going home. The following day Mr.

Haddington took Sunshine and me to Ryde, and from thence to Ventnor and Shanklin. The exquisite pleasure experienced as we walked through the "Chine" at the latter place, then rarely frequented by visitors, I shall never forget. We were on board the steamer, returning home, and my thoughts had wandered away to Fred, sleeping his long sleep in the bed of the ocean, when Sunshine, with a large bunch of river flags and ferns which we had gathered at Shanklin in her hands, came to my side, and roguishly suggested that we should try our fortunes in the same childish way we used to do at Enderfield, to which I agreed. So she gave Mr. Haddington two of the long flat leaves which she held in her hand, and instructed him to throw them into the water as representatives of himself and the future Mrs. H. This he did, and the leaves glided away together till they were lost to view in the distance. Sunshine followed suit with similar results, and then it was my turn; but the leaves which I threw in separated as soon as they touched the water, and one of them being instantly caught by the revolving paddle, was quickly lost to sight. Sunshine joked and teazed me about it, and entreated me to try again. I did so, and fared worse than before, for, in my excitement, I threw one considerably further than the other, and a billow rolling over it, increased the distance betwixt it and its companion. Sunshine laughingly declared that my fate was fixed, and that I should be an old maid. We all made merry over it *then*, but many times since I have thought of the flags upon the water as the emblems of our lives, and I have smiled sadly over the fate of the girl whose flag was engulfed by the billow.

After the few days of idleness, consequent upon the visit of Mr. Haddington, we returned to our upholstering work,

and soon everything was, as Ralph said, in apple-pie order. We experienced very little difficulty in securing a few pupils in the neighbourhood. The state of my father's health, coupled with the smallness of the house, necessitated the number being limited. During the early part of the summer father's health visibly improved, and there appeared every prospect of our enjoying a season of comparative peace and happiness. It was only when our garments needed replacing that we felt our poverty. We wore cambrics, prints, and various other washing dresses, contriving to eke out our money by washing and ironing them ourselves, a feat for which we received a reward in the shape of Ralph's unfeigned admiration of our costumes.

We had just given our little pupils a fortnight's holiday, when I received a letter from Eva Chester, in which she stated that her brother John purposed bringing her to England. She was going to be married very soon, and wished to purchase her *trousseau* in London. In conclusion, she requested me to look out for some pretty country lodgings near us, as they purposed running down to Southampton for a month or six weeks, when she had finished her shopping. Then in a postscript she added a request that I would write, or get Ralph to write, and persuade Minnie to accompany them. When I showed her letter to Ralph, how his face brightened as he hastened to comply with her request. I rose earlier than usual the following morning, and immediately after breakfast started off to execute her commission concerning the lodgings. I succeeded in procuring suitable rooms within a mile of our own house, and the landlady promised to reserve them until Eva came. Then I wrote to Eva, informing her of my success, and begging her to come to

Southampton before going to London, telling her that if she did we should have more time together, as there would be one week free from school duties. She complied with my request, and at the end of the week we had the pleasure of greeting her, together with John and Minnie, at the Southampton terminus. Then followed a succession of happy days. Minnie found her happiness at Ralph's side. She looked so radiantly beautiful, and behaved so gently and lovingly to all, that I inwardly condemned myself for having judged her so harshly. Somehow I had very little of Eva's society, for in our walks she and Sunshine invariably strolled off together, leaving the task of entertaining John to me. One evening, when we were walking together, I happened to remark to him how intensely I enjoyed riding. The following morning Eva sent me her riding habit, and soon afterwards arrived herself, and begged me to accept the loan of it, saying that John and Ralph had ordered horses for us from some neighbouring stables, and she and Sunshine intended having a quiet walk while we went for our ride. Of course it was impossible to refuse, even had I felt inclined to do so, which was not the case. So an hour later, Ralph and Minnie, together with John and myself, were cantering across the Southampton Common. What a handsome couple Ralph and Minnie were! She was mounted upon a white horse, her delicately rounded figure poised so gracefully in her saddle, and her long shining hair, coiled carelessly at the back of her beautiful head, glittering in the rays of the sun like liquid gold, her eyes sparkling like stars, and the soft colour of perfect health suffusing its blushing beauty over her fair, transparent skin. She almost out-rivalled Sunshine. But there was one striking difference between her and Sunshine; Minnie was selfish and calculating,

even in her love for Ralph; she had already fixed a price upon it, a price which Ralph must win to the uttermost farthing ere he could call her wife. But Sunshine was all womanly; loveable and unselfish, giving to all of us her pure, affectionate love as freely and plentifully as a spring gives forth its life-giving water. The day of our ride was also the last day of the vacation. The following morning our pupils re-assembled, and then our intercourse with the Chesters, except on Sundays, was confined to evenings and half-holidays. Swiftly flew the days, and then came the hour for their departure for London, and we were alone once more. Robbed of the pleasure of their society, the house seemed lone and dreary to me, and the routine of the schoolroom more irksome than before. When school duties were ended for the day, I threw my remaining energies into my evening occupation, the nature of which I confided to Sunshine; Ralph already knew. I was writing a novel, and spending many hours stolen from sleep over it. I laugh heartily now over the first attempt, and even after the lapse of so many years I should feel ashamed to meet the publisher to whom I offered it when it was completed, though then I fondly dreamt that it would be to me "a thing of beauty and a joy for ever." While writing it I built innumerable airy castles, with it for a foundation, planning how I would spend the money which I should receive for my work. I pictured myself in the future spoken of as "the talented and clever authoress, Miss Munro," and imagined how proudly I should read the review of my book in the "Times," the said review being accompanied by a prophetic paragraph concerning my future career as one of the bright particular stars on those serene ethereal heights where heaven-born genius wields her sway. At the

end of August this wonderful three-volume-novel was completed, gorgeously tied up with scarlet ribbons—what a waste of both money and taste upon a cynical publisher!—and forwarded to Mr. Hartley, of Piccadilly. Patiently as I could I awaited the acceptance, of course, of the MS., and in imagination Sunshine and I spent the money again and again. Still neither letter nor cheque came. I said to myself that the publisher was only waiting lest we should think him too eager to accept it, and that by-and-bye he would answer in the pompous style usual with publishers—"that after due consideration," &c., &c., he had decided to publish 'Archery Hall, its Phantoms and Shadows,' and would at once send me proofs for revision." So sure of success was I that I repaired my wardrobe, and did up every bit of sewing that required doing in order that nothing might interfere with the work of revising—yet no answer came! Then I wrote a short note, requesting a reply to my previous communication. The reply came, and ran as follows: "In answer to Miss Munro's communication, Mr. Hartley forwards MS., which he regrets to say is of no use to him. In fact, he doubts if anyone would undertake to publish the work of an authoress whose writings so plainly indicate her youth and inexperience." Down came all my castles? Indeed they did not. Even this crushing note failed to annihilate my vanity. I concluded that the publisher to whom I had sent my precious MS. was a crabbed and disappointed man, who could not appreciate my poetic sentiments. What more could a reading public possibly require than my book contained? In it were descriptions of purple water reflecting the green forest trees, and word-pictures sufficiently harrowing to awaken the ghost of a hangman's heart, and love scenes such as fools can always furnish if required. In writing some of them I had worked

myself into a perfect frenzy of passion. As for the heroine, I made her suffer, sweet patient creature, as only heroines can suffer. Woe and trouble sufficient to break a dozen hearts fell to her lot. And yet Mr. Hartley dared to say the writing indicated youth and inexperience! I sent it off again; this time to another publisher, who returned it to me in the course of a few days, with the following withering sentence, written on the top of the first page: "Totally unfit for publication." Oh, how I wished that all publishers would go down to the sea-side to read over the produce of other people's brains, and that the true spirit of poetic inspiration would thrill through them as they listened to the roar of the waves, instead of conning them in their musty dens, where the roar and din of the traffic outside banished every poetic thought. If I could have had my way they should have dwelt in a perfect Arcadia of sunshine and flowers, with blank cheque-books innumerable, and an unlimited account at Messrs. Birbeck and Co.'s bank upon which to draw for authors and authoresses. Ralph laughed at my indignation, and proposed that I should take my MS. to London myself, promising me a ticket the next time there was an excursion there. This was the very thing I wanted. Fortunately my patience was not taxed very long. There was an excursion on the following Saturday, and with a light heart I departed for London. But I returned with a heavy one. I found that every publisher to whom I applied refused to undertake my book, excepting at my own risk. "What would it cost?" I inquired of the last one to whom I applied. "Oh, with advertisements, about one hundred and fifty pounds," he replied. I went out, and laughed in bitter scorn. Was the want of such a small sum of money to keep me from winning fame and blot out the glorious future which I had pictured

for myself? For even then I thought, poor visionary girl that I was, that if once my story appeared in the glory of print, all the world would see and marvel at its beauty. The disappointment was a bitter one, and I brooded over it during the whole of my homeward journey.

Ralph met me at the station, and as we walked home under the quiet stars, I recounted to him my day's adventures. When I had finished, he declared his intention of calling me "Unrecognized Genius," instead of "Pearl." He was so merry that I could not refrain from laughing too, and when we reached home I left the recital of my woes to him, while I disposed of my supper with a keen relish that all my sorrows had failed to deprive me of, and then went to bed, and in anything but heroine fashion, fell asleep, which didn't much matter, because I was never intended for a heroine. If I passed a sleepless night I could not appear at breakfast the next morning with a "pink-shell-like tint upon my beautiful face," after the fashion of heroines in general. On the contrary, I should have been uncomfortably pale, and if I cried, my eyes, instead of resembling "the morn of a radiant summer day, with the purple mist enhancing its beauty," were apt to look red and heavy, and were shown to a still greater disadvantage by a nose peculiarly red and swollen. Knowing this to be a lamentable fact, I had long since come to the conclusion that my peculiar province was to act as little as possible like the heroine in a novel, and as much as possible like a rational human being. I couldn't sit at an open window till the first streak of dawn lightened the horizon, gazing upon "the shadow of my wrecked hopes;" had I done so, the following day would have found me the victim of neuralgia, or some equally agonizing pain.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER my adventures in London, my efforts in the literary line ceased for some time. Then I tried my pen on a poem, which I forwarded to the editor of a popular magazine. For months, as soon as the magazine was published, I searched its pages. At first I felt hurt because my poem did not appear; then I began to realize that it was very uncertain whether it ever would do so, and at last I ceased to look for it. Seven months passed, when one evening, as I was carelessly glancing over one of the daily newspapers, my attention was arrested by the word "Munro." Looking at the heading of the paragraph in which it appeared, I discovered it to be a review of the magazine to which my poem had been sent, and read "It also contains a pretty and fanciful poem by Pearl Munro. Both in rhyme and rhythm it is almost perfect, and it has a melodious flow which bespeaks the practised versifier." As calmly as I could I put on my walking attire, and went out to get the magazine, telling Sunshine that most likely I should not return for an hour or two. I procured it, and without even glancing inside its pages walked on till I reached the Southampton Common. There, in an unfrequented spot, I read my poem. Do not laugh at my childishness, reader, when I tell you that I laughed and cried over it, actually kissing it with a passionate joy; in fact I was almost delirious with delight. It was my first-born! My glory! I seated myself beneath

one of the majestic trees that stud the Common, and fully gave myself up to the joy of the moment, as complete as earthly joy could possibly be. The wind was gently caressing the tops of the old trees, and whispering musically among their foliage; the amorous birds were trilling out soft responses to each other; a little stream gurgled past, as if it understood and answered my joy; while a bright yellow-eyed daisy peeped up at me with an air so confiding that I positively stooped and pressed my lips to it. Ah, how bright every particle of creation seemed to me, because tinged with the roseate hue of my own thoughts. As the snowy clouds floated slowly over the serene and azure sky, I, dreamer that I was, thought it less fair than my future. No volume of poems, no works however voluminous, emanating from my pen ever stirred my heart as did my first-born. I rejoiced over it, as a fond mother rejoices over her fair bud of promise —her babe—and wondered if anyone else would love it as I loved it. I sat there until the gathering dew warned me to retrace my steps. When I told them at home, they all seemed pleased, but none of them exhibited any rapturous admiration of my treasure. So I took it away to my own room, and for many a day it was my first and last thought. I was rather surprised at receiving no remuneration for it. But I lived on in the firm belief that the future held both fame and wealth for me.

Sunshine was a poem in herself. There seemed to be an intangible presence surrounding her, and as her ever beautiful face grew more ethereally lovely, I became aware that she had "suffered a soul change." Most vividly do I recall watching her one evening, and marvelling at the *spirituelle* loveliness of her face, little thinking that by one of those

strange fatalities which so often sweep over families, her rare beauty was so soon to shine with added lustre in the Eden above, where her Saviour, in all His kingly majesty, welcomed his spotless bride. But so it was! When Mr. Haddington again visited us, Sunshine was ailing. Before he returned home she was transported to that land where the inhabitants no more say, "I am sick." When she first appeared seriously ill, we at once sent for Dr. Thompson. He said she was suffering from typhoid fever, but gave every hope of her ultimate recovery. What a sanctuary she made her sick room! Now warbling hymns of praise, now communing with her Saviour, exulting as only a Christian can exult, with a joy and gladness unspeakable. I had been sitting up with her two nights in succession, and on the second morning, as Mr. Haddington was pouring out a cup of coffee for me, he said, "Your sister's physical loveliness is indeed a feeble type of her mental beauty. Her heart seems to be a fount of purest thought and grace. God grant it may yet shed its sweetness abroad on the earth." Oh, how heartily I echoed that prayer! But as the days passed on, the doctor's face assumed an expression as he looked at her, which banished hope from the sick chamber and admitted dark despair. Her mind wandered, and I had to listen to her incoherent ravings or piteous moans that no one loved her, and that she was all alone. Sometimes, she would argue with herself concerning her love for Mr. Haddington, declaring that no sin dwelt in her love for him, with his noble character, and Christian virtues. It could not be wrong to love one so good, so manly. He should never know it; Pearl should never guess it; but, oh, she did love him so. My step-mother listened to these ravings, shedding bitter tears, and

moaning over Sunshine as though she had been her own child; but, alas! no tears would come to my eyes. The fountain was sealed; a strong despair seemed to have taken possession of me. I would not ask God to spare her life. It was not at all likely He would stoop to hear me if I did pray. I wanted to defy him. Oh, how I wished it were possible to take my life in my hands, and cast away his superfluous gift. Gift indeed! Life might be a gift, but certainly I did not want it. I fiercely wondered who did - a season of weary strife —sore bereavement—and endless, unsatisfied yearnings. Why, it was not worth the having. Thus I argued in my wilful blindness. What a mercy that God, in His supreme majesty and love, watches over the tempest-tossed sons of men in their reckless despair, heart-breaking misery, and almost insane reasoning, and pities, with an infinitude of compassion, souls such as these, not leaving them in the blackness of that spirit-night when the soul cries out, "There is no God!" but rescuing them from an abyss so black and a danger so appalling, He places His own pure pledge upon them. Soon the angel with the amaranthine wreath entered our dwelling, and bore away our darling. We were gathered round her bed, momentarily expecting her departure, when she called Mr. Haddington toward her, and with loving words blessed him and his mission. Then she said to him, "Raise my head upon your arm. I should like to die so." He raised the dying head, and kissed her forehead and lips. When all the others had said farewell, she said to me, "Put your hand in mine, darling Pearl." Then turning her sweet face to mine, she kissed me again and again, saying, "God keep my sister! Pearl, promise me that if God gives you power to write, you will pen each word in His Glory, and then my sister shall shine as a star in her Saviour's diadem."

I could not or would not promise. How could I serve One whom I considered a task-master and a despot? A slight shadow gathered over her face, then, as if God's own radiance brooded o'er her, she whispered, "He will lead you to Him, though it be by a way you know not. Ah, He will! right through the briars, the storms, and desolation, to His own ineffable brightness." Then it seemed as if an icy hand was grasping my heart-strings, and freezing every feeling of my soul, as I watched with numbed pain the closing of the sweet violet eyes, and knew that the bird-like voice was for ever hushed. I have a dim recollection of Ralph leading me away, and of someone wishing that I would weep, of self-pity stifled, and an obdurate resolve to remain with Sunshine. It is as one remembers a dream that I remember the night when I crept to her coffin, and watched the still face of her who lay therein. What a frantic desire to unclose the eyes and catch once more the old familiar expression possessed me, as I took betwixt my fingers one of the little ringlets that curled upon her white, cold brow, and kissed the rose-bud lips, pale in death, and which would never more breathe out loving words to me. I could not realize that she was indeed dead. How could I? Before the coffin was closed, Mr. Haddington placed a beautiful white rose in her hand, and she looked like one of God's dear angels awaiting her transformation into bliss. Death came to her not as the king of terrors, but as a white robed-messenger, bearing the keys of the "pearly gate." I leaned on Ralph's arm, as our minister repeated the beautiful life-giving words, "In sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection," and heard his low deep-breathed "Thank God!"—with mingled feelings of rebellion and pain, followed by a chaotic feeling quite indescribable.

I remember nothing more until the close of an autumn

day, when I opened my eyes, to see Ralph sitting beside my bed, and regarding me with wistful tenderness. As soon as he caught my glance, he silently but hurriedly left the room. My stepmother was soon in his place, imprinting soft kisses on my cheek and brow, and bidding me "be quiet" and "ask no questions." Many days elapsed ere I was told how ill I had been. The terrible strain on my nerves consequent upon the illness and death of my dearly loved sister had ended in an attack of brain fever, and for five weeks my hold upon life had been despaired of. Several more days passed, and I noticed that father had never been in to see me; but my weakness was so extreme that I did not even think his omitting to do so strange. However, I asked for him one day, and was told that he was "away and very happy." This satisfied me for the time being, but one afternoon, as Ralph was re-arranging my pillow, the thought flashed into my mind that it was utterly unlike my father to be away from home at such a time. Besides, where could he go? I arrested Ralph's hands in their task of smoothing the pillows, and asked him where father was. He has since told me that he saw at a glance that he must tell me. So, tenderly as he could, he told me that father and Sunshine were sleeping in one grave, and that as he stood beside my father's open grave, he expected momentarily to be summoned to my dying bed. How I wept and clung to Ralph, and begged him always to love me, saying, "Now father, and mother, and Sunshine are gone; we are all alone!" My step-mother coming into the room at the moment, heard my piteous entreaties and strove to comfort me. I never thought how cruelly I wrung her heart when I said, "Ralph and I stood alone."

I recovered very slowly, so slowly that I often wondered if I

should die, and half hoped that I might. There prevails among a certain class of Christians the theory that only Christians can look forward to an escape from sorrow when they die, and consequently they alone can hope for death. It is true that only for Christians is there light beyond the tomb; still, many people die quietly and peacefully who possess no such hope; they never look into the great futurity beyond, for their eyes are blinded. It is not true that the friends of all dying unbelievers are compelled to witness awful and harrowing deathbed scenes. Many apathetically sink into the sleep of death, lulled by the Tempter into a delusive dream, the awaking from which has never been witnessed by mortal eye. Others stoically nerve themselves at the beck of the mysterious visitor, and pass into eternity leaning upon a shadow. I believe that had I died then, I should have traversed the "Valley of the Shadow of Death" with unfaltering steps, and, in a dreamy, lethargic state, have entered the spirit world, to find, too late, that God is a God of justice as well as mercy. I had not the slightest wish to recover, until one day when mamma brought to me Sunshine's desk, and also an old one of my father's, which she said he had desired that I should have, as it contained, among other things, the letters of my sainted mother. This effectually aroused me, and for days I pored over the thoughts penned by my angel mother while she was on earth. I had nearly finished their perusal, and from them had learnt much concerning my mother's life and character, when I suddenly lighted upon an envelope labelled, "To be given to Margaret when she is old enough to comprehend her mother's story." I locked the door, and tearing open the envelope, immediately commenced the perusal of its contents.

CHAPTER X.

AS I read my mother's story, so will I write it :—

"As I write, you are sitting on the floor, Margaret, trying with your little fingers to imprison the stray sunbeams that glance across the room, while merry child-laughter rings out from your pretty rosebud lips. Sunshine is sleeping peacefully in her cot; her little dimpled arms, of a delicate pink hue, like apple blossom, are tossed out on to the snowy coverlet, and the little fair face, with its halo of golden hair, nestling on the pillow, is a picture almost unearthly in its beauty. She is the lovelier of the two—yet you are dearer to your mother, my child, than any of her other treasures, because to her you were the harbinger of peace. Always remember, my pet, that your mother loves you—loves you always; whether on earth or in heaven, her affection for you is unconquerable and unchangeable. We call you Margaret because it is my name, and since it became yours also, I have prayed day and night that you may have a life very different to mine. I am dying, and as I write the word I find it has no power to move my heart, or cause it one extra pulsation. To me dying simply means going home, and though I feel peacefully happy, yet I am weary, oh, so weary, and I long to get there. I know I shall have to leave you behind me, my precious child, but even in that thought there is no sting. I should have liked to call you Theodora, because you were indeed

the gift of God to me. How I had prayed God to give me a little daughter, and when you came, and I felt you nestling in my arms, I gained strength to live, aye, and even to rejoice. The enshrouding gloom that had surrounded me vanished, and the brightness of day dawned.

Long ago, I thought life one glad day of brightness, but my glowing dreams had no power to dispel the lurking shadows, which, though I knew it not, surrounded me. When twelve years of age, I became an orphan. I was left to the guardianship of an aunt, my mother's youngest sister, and Mr. Moysten, a young gentleman who had always been to my father (whose bitterest disappointment had been the birth of a daughter instead of an heir to his estate) as a son.

I did not grieve when my father died; for as a little one I remember often hearing him say, 'Take that child away, I cannot bear the sight of her.' Alas! the sight of me only awoke painful memories. My mother gave her life for mine. At the time of my father's death, Mr. Moysten was twenty-four years of age, and my aunt Adelaide a year or two his senior. She was a magnificent woman. Her every movement was queenly and graceful. I was a weak, ailing child, hardly ever quite well. In my eyes, Mr. Moysten was as handsome as "Prince Charming," and my willing fancy endowed him with every manly and heroic attribute. How love, more especially childish love, glorifies its object! Putting its own beautiful colouring upon every action, it irradiates and exalts it. I lived with my aunt, and one of the purest enjoyments that fell to my lot were those afternoons when Mr. Moysten visited us, and acted as my cavalier, while we cantered along the green lanes, or else walked under the trees. To me those afternoons were like glimpses of an enchanted existence.

I was his devoted slave. When he went fishing, I used to put the writhing bait upon the hooks with unflinching fingers, because it was for him, although in my heart I often wished that I could put them on to the cool earth instead, and let them live out the brief span of their existence. The days spent with him were days never to be forgotten by me. The months followed each other in quick succession, and passed away. And I grew stronger, and, so he used to tell me, more beautiful. He always called me his little wife, and I was more than content to be so called.

When I was sixteen my governess left me to reside with a married sister, and for six months afterwards my happiness seemed perfect. Before I was seventeen Mr. Moysten and I plighted our troth. We were to be married as soon as I attained my majority; and I drank in the bliss of those halcyon days without any forebodings for the future. What cared I that my father had willed that I should not marry until I came of age, for were not Frank and I always together? I took not the slightest notice of what Aunt Adelaide said, when, from time to time, she inveighed against long engagements, and the disparity in our age. She had quite a genius for music. Her voice was sweet and full, and crowned with a wonderful pathos. She never played showy pieces or brilliant fantasias, but the dear home music that enters one's heart, and with a soft and holy touch wakes the feelings slumbering there. One summer's evening she was singing a plaintive ballad entitled 'Lost,' in which a young maiden mourns for her lost love, who has passed from her to a land beyond the seas. The evening shadows were lengthening and becoming darker; in the west, 'twixt two sombre clouds, a golden glory played, as though heaven's gates were ajar

revealing just a glimpse of its brightness. Frank and I had watched it for some time with unexpressed thoughts, and as Auntie left the piano and joined us at the window, my eyes filled with happy tears, for had I not my love beside me? Earth looked so fair and bright to me, that even heaven's glorious mysteries were undesired and unsought. My heaven was below! My treasure was on earth! I cared for it only. Why should I desire to see or know any other?"

Here the writing became indistinct and blurred, as if tears had fallen thick and fast upon it, rendering it quite illegible, so that I cannot give that portion of my mother's history. Further down she continued :—

"I saw in the very reticence of his manner towards her how much he loved my aunt, and the subdued way in which she lavished caresses upon me, as though she had done me some wrong which she could not undo, convinced me that his love was reciprocated. We had been talking one afternoon of a Dissenting Chapel which had been opened in the neighbourhood, and for the amusement of my Aunt and Frank I was mimicking the dialect of a north country preacher, to whom for a few moments I had listened at the entrance of the chapel, when, as though quite unconscious of my presence, Frank requested Auntie to sing 'Lost.' He opened the piano for her, and then walked across to the window and stood there while Auntie's sweet voice filled the room. I furtively watched the expression of his face as she sang, and when with a world of pathos in her voice she wailed out the refrain, 'I mourn, I mourn, I mourn my love, who will ne'er return,' it struck like a death chill to my heart. I felt that it was not she who would mourn, but I, for Frank was drinking in every word as though love was a new thing to him.

I know that a little while after they both remarked on my extreme pallor, and pleading a severe headache, I escaped to my own room and solitude.

I thank God it would be impossible to spend a night like that one twice in a life-time. Like circumstances may occur again and again, but no after wound rankles as does the first. I took off my shoes and paced to and fro in my room, oblivious to everything but the fact that I had lost Frank's love. I knew him well enough to feel sure that he would honourably fulfil his engagement and marry me if I wished it, but how could I let any man marry me unless he loved me, loved me above every woman in the world. Amid all the tumult of pain and tempest of thought, which surged through my brain, I seemed to hear the words of the Methodist preacher, whom I had mimicked in the afternoon, echo through my quiet chamber. The clock on the mantelpiece ticked them out, and the ghostly shadows seemed to taunt me with the repetition of the words, 'The righteous cry and the Lord heareth them, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.' I wondered who would deliver me out of mine. What should I do! Perhaps if I had been righteous, God would have delivered me. That preacher had said something about a soul-sickness which, if not cured, ended in eternal death, and had likened the manner in which God removed soul maladies to a mother who, in order to save her child's life in sickness, administers bitter, nauseous medicine, which she forces him to take, even though he pleads against it; going on to show that God often dealt with His children in the same manner, and through bitter sorrow and trouble saved them into eternal joy. Then I remembered hearing our own dear pastor upon one occasion explain God's love in bereaving people thus. A

poor sheep with a little lamb beside it was travelling through a lane where the herbage was poor and scant. At the end of the lane a plentiful pasturage was provided, and thither the shepherd strove to coax the sheep, but all his efforts were in vain. So he came and took the lamb in his arms and carried it straight to the meadow, whither the sheep followed him, bleating most piteously for her lamb all the way. She might have had it beside her all through the journey had she but listened to the voice of the shepherd at first, but she did not, and therefore he took the lamb in order that she might follow. But I told myself that my case was very different, and that the above simile was not applicable to it. If I let my treasure go and followed the shepherd, I should never have it again for my own. Thus selfishly I reasoned, knowing not the glorious declaration, 'My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.' I had not learnt that no earthly treasure is so full or so satisfying as treasure laid up in Heaven, and that no earthly love can aspire to that displayed by the Father when He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son to ransom the sin-stained world. I had no such thoughts then. All was darkness and pain unutterable.

I decided to tell Frank that I could not be his wife, and then stedfastly refuse any explanation of my conduct should he ask one. The following morning after we had returned from our ride, as I stood in the hall, with my riding habit gathered over my arm, he put his hands on my shoulder and kissed me. That kiss stung me to madness. I haughtily requested him never to kiss me again, for I had resolved not to be his wife, and had only been awaiting a favourable opportunity to tell him so. I often wondered how I bore the look

he gave me. I believe he thought it was some childish freak, of which I should immediately repent, for he simply said, 'I hope you will be a little more reasonable when you come down to dinner, Margaret.' I went up-stairs with a gnawing pain at my heart, such as I had never before experienced, and did not go down to dinner, and when Auntie came up to inquire the reason, I declared that it was impossible for me to go down, my head ached so violently, and I repulsed her with unwarrantable rudeness when she attempted to caress me. She had stolen my love from me, and I hated her with a vehement hatred. Why had she ever crossed my path with her keen knowledge, clear judgment, rich melodious voice, and equal beauty? What were my attractions compared with the peerless grace she possessed? Oh, she might have left Frank's love; she needn't have stolen that away from me! Ah, Auntie—my poor Auntie, how I wronged you!

I passed another sleepless night, thinking how happy I would have striven to make Frank as his wife. My love would have made me count all too little to do for him. I hardly dared think what my life would be without him. My bookcase was almost filled with his favourite authors, and in the works of the poets we both loved, numerous passages had been marked by him. My heart almost broke as I thought of what our life together might have been.

Strange it is, but none the less true, that all girls who by circumstances are estranged from the man of their love always picture his loss as well as their own. They hold firmly to the idea that no other woman can love him so devotedly and deeply as they do. Thus I thought. I argued that it was quite impossible for Aunt Adelaide to lavish the wealth of love and tenderness upon him that I should have done."

Again the writing is effaced and tear-stained, but where it becomes legible again the story continues :—

"It was all over, and I was starting for Scotland. I was going to pay a visit to my father's sister, Helen. A month previously Frank had left for Switzerland. I had hardly seen him since the day when I told him I could never be his wife. After his departure he wrote to me, but I returned his letter unanswered; I dared not trust myself to write to him, lest he should discover *how much* I loved him. I thought it rather strange that the dissolving of our engagement had made no difference in his bearing toward Aunt Adelaide, and when he came to say farewell to us before starting on his tour, I nerved myself to make some light remark about his 'passing fancy for me,' saying I knew he would marry someone who would be a more suitable companion for him than a mere child such as I could have been. He gravely replied, 'It may be so.' I remained three years with Aunt Helen, and then I met your father. Margaret, my darling, always remember this — I *loved* your father; not with the passionate adoring love which a woman gives but once in a lifetime; still, I loved him deeply and truly, or I should never have been his wife. He has always been a tender and devoted husband to me. He has needed all the love he bore me, for the grief I suffered undermined my constitution, and I have been weak and ill for years. I had been married little more than two years, when, one day, as I was sitting in my dressing-room, nursing Ralph, your father came running upstairs, and entering the room, said, as he imprinted a kiss on my forehead, 'Maggie, darling, make yourself look bonnie, for I have brought an old friend to see you—your guardian.' I felt myself grow chill and faint, for though I had long since

ceased to love Frank, I had an unaccountable dread of meeting him.

When I entered the room where he was, I contrived to say a few common-place words, expressive of the pleasure I felt in seeing him. He greeted me with stately courtesy. When we were in the drawing-room, after dinner that evening, he said he had some news to impart which he thought would please me, and then he proceeded to tell us that Aunt Adelaide was to be married the following month. I answered, with as much *nonchalance* as I could assume, 'Oh, indeed! To whom is she to be married?'

'Do you not know?'

'No, indeed! I have not the slightest idea.'

'To a gentleman to whom she has been engaged for the last ten years. They would have been married long ago, but her father refused to give her to a poor man. So he got an appointment in India, where he has been working hard ever since, and has now returned a comparatively wealthy man. Don't you think they deserve to be happy?' I faintly assented, and he continued, 'Do you remember one evening when I asked your aunt to sing 'Lost?' I did it without thinking of the words of the song, simply because, like poor Kirk White, 'I was sad and knew not why.' Only a short time previously she had received a few lines from her lover—weak, irregular lines—saying that he was very ill, but hoped to be well enough to write a long letter by the next mail. The mail was in, but there was no letter. As soon as she commenced singing, it struck me how very thoughtless I had been. Remembering what a state of suspense she was in, I watched her face, expecting her voice to break down every moment, but—brave woman that she was—she sang on to the end without a tear,

though I could see that her heart was almost breaking. I wanted to tell you of her trouble, but she said, 'No, don't cloud her sunny sky with my troubles.' So I said nothing to you upon the subject.'

So I had suffered for nought. Frank had sympathized with Auntie, but never loved her, and with my own rashness I had spoilt my life and his. How I longed to get away from everyone, even from my husband, and try to realize what I had done!

That night I told your father the whole of my bitter story. He was not angry, as I half expected he would be; he only pitied and caressed me, and all through the subsequent years he has been to me everything that a husband could be. Long since, I have found that the words read by that preacher so many years ago are words of truth—'The Lord heareth the righteous, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.' I am very weary, but very happy. I wonder if my Maggie will ever understand the minor wail that has mingled with the music of the last few years, and comprehend that even with it deep chords of thankfulness have vibrated from the same source.

If ever you read this story, it will be when life in its spring-like beauty is just opening up before you. My precious child, remember that its beauty is not o'erclouded, but enhanced by rendering to God a willing service. No joy is so full as the joy He gives—no ease so perfect—no comfort so great! Render up to Him in willing devotion His gift—your life.

Farewell, my child. Sometimes I wish that I could raise the dark veil which obscures the future, and see you when you peruse your mother's story. I wish I could make you feel that my dear children will never be absent from my

thoughts in Heaven. A mother's love never dies. I think mine will grow deeper and stronger within the portals of 'My father's house on high.' Ah, to place my finger upon my pulse, and know that ere long it will have ceased to beat! To listen to the merry laughter of my darlings, knowing that soon—God only knows how soon—I shall have to leave them, would be heart-breaking, if it were all; but it is not. My children will never want a mother's watchful eye, for if my Heavenly Father will permit me, I will watch over you all, day and night."

How my heart ached as I read my mother's story! How I wished that just for once I could feel her arms around me, and lay my head upon her breast! No one but themselves can ever know how motherless ones ofttimes yearn for a mother's caress, as they strive to stifle the pain caused by the lack of her loving sympathy.

In Sunshine's desk I found a diary, or rather, numerous memoranda of special occurrences, together with many mementoes of her sweet piety. As I read of her earnest strivings to follow the teachings of the Great Master, I became possessed of the secret of my sister's pure, guileless life.

My sister, thou art not dead; the memory of thy life is ever enshrined in my heart, as the memory of the lives of the inheritors of the City Undefiled, which, though unknown to us in all its beauty, is partially revealed to us by lives such as thine. Oh, life beyond! Oh, glorious re-union! Oh, Holy City! How near thy pearly gates appear, as we dwell upon the memory of the loved ones gathered within them!

CHAPTER XI.

THROUGH all the weary days of my convalescence my stepmother bore with my selfish morbidness, and tended me with untiring kindness. Ralph used to spend all his evenings in my little room, reading to me, or talking with me, until I almost forgot my weariness.

What a glad day it was when I was well enough to go out into the garden once more! As I paced slowly up and down, leaning upon Ralph's arm, everything seemed deliciously fresh and bright. Yet no thanks to my Creator rose in my heart, though Ralph declared that he could sing all day long if his joy were not subdued by the thought of our lost ones. It seemed strange when Ralph took the Bible, and conducted family worship that evening. All the gladness went out of my heart as he seated himself at the small harmonium—Eva's parting gift to me—and commenced one of Baxter's grand old hymns:—

"If life be long, I will be glad
That I may long obey,
If short, yet why should I be sad
To soar to endless day?

Christ leads me through no darker rooms
Than He went through before:
He that into God's kingdom comes,
Must enter by His door."

When we came to the last verse—

"My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim,
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all;
And I shall be with Him."—

my voice faltered, but his rang out clear and strong, as though his spirit was appealing to the Deity. Then he prayed with us as father had been accustomed to pray, and he thanked God that though our loved ones had crossed the river of death and entered into everlasting life, we were yet one family, and that there awaited us a glorious meeting in the future. A great calm seemed to pervade the room as he pleaded for light and help to walk in the path that our loved ones had trodden, and even my rebellious heart was touched by the realization of the thought that we were still one family. True, our sojourn was in a land where vacant chairs and lonely hearts are ever found, but perhaps, who can tell?—the spirits of our dear departed ones hover around the old home, and comfort the lonely ones gathered there.

A month or two after this, our stepmother announced her intention to go and reside with her only sister, saying, "I think, Margaret, that Ralph and you will be happier by yourselves, and, besides, I should like to be near Tom." (Tom was at school in the town where his aunt lived.)

Eva Chester was married, and Minnie had been urging upon Ralph the importance of my having a change, declaring that it would effectually rouse me from my apathy and weakness. So Ralph persuaded my step-mother not to hurry her change of residence, but to remain with him whilst I visited the Chesters for a month or two, to which she consented.

Within a fortnight I again stood upon the shore of the "Emerald Isle," and received if possible a more hearty welcome than upon the occasion of my former visit. Eva and her husband met me at the North Walls, and although her greeting was very quiet, it was full of womanly sympathy. Her husband pressed me to accept their hospitality for a few

weeks, when my visit to Mr. Chester terminated. John and Minnie arrived as we were quitting the vessel. Minnie just glanced at my mourning attire, and said something about being sorry, and then commenced teazing me, saying, among other things, that John had taken a holiday for the express purpose of forwarding a daily bulletin concerning my improved health to Ralph.

What weeks of quiet happiness followed, o'ershadowed only by the thought of my loss. How often we walked through the beautiful Dargle in County Wicklow, riding thither on a car, and then wandering through the winding paths and gathering specimens of the exquisite ferns which add so much to the dainty loveliness of the scenery. All true lovers of nature should visit this spot; it is full of rare rich romantic beauty. The rugged rocks, the variously-tinted foliage, and the silvery stream winding beneath, make a ravishing picture. The banks on either side the river rise to the height of three hundred feet, and are completely covered with Ireland's own green foliage. It would not be complete unless some romantic story were connected with it, and of course there is one attached to a high perpendicular rock, called the "Lover's Leap." As John repeated the legend an eerie feeling crept over me. "A maiden, fair but fickle, lived near the mouth of the Dargle, and before she had quite forgotten her old love, pledged her hand to a new suitor. While listening to the honied words which fell from his lips, she heard the church bell tolling, and, on inquiring the name of the dead, was told that her former lover had fallen a victim to his sorrow. Remorse at once filled her bosom, and her old love rekindled with tenfold vigour. She fled from the presence of him who had caused her to perjure herself, and who had now grown

hateful to her, and spent all that night at the grave of her lost love. Friends and relatives in vain tried to persuade her that regret was useless; she yielded to them in so far as to accompany them home in the morning, but when night came she again repaired to the grave, and passed the hours of darkness there. At length her mind gave way, and she gleefully informed her friends that her former lover had come to life again, that they had walked and talked in the glen as of old, and that he had promised to return and lead her to a place where they should never part. Alarmed by her looks and words, her friends placed a watch over her, but she managed to escape. Her brother at once set out for the churchyard, expecting to find her there. As he approached she rushed from the enclosure, sped towards the river, and with a cry of joy threw herself headlong into the abyss. The peasants say that even still her spirit glides over the waters and startles the passers-by, as the mist creeps down the hillsides."

When John had finished his recital, he said—

"Perhaps it is a pity to spoil the beauty and pathos of the legend by saying so, but I think that any man or woman who cannot face life bravely and unflinchingly after a disappointment must be a coward. Cowardice must be the most prominent trait in the character of a person who succumbs to death simply because a little of life's good has been denied them." And then, though in different words, he echoed Mr. Haddington's opinion that all sorrow could be greatly alleviated, if not completely cured, by hard work.

Half of this life's sorrows and cares are purely imaginary. From my heart I endorse the opinion that "Earnest work is a cure for any sorrow." Hearts don't break—they are only wounded; but if you open the wound again and again, and

brood o'er its depth and pain, it may mortify, and finally cause death. Never let other people probe your heart wounds. Don't give them the chance, neither probe them yourself. Don't look at them, and ponder over them, but steadily and unfalteringly take in hand the work that lies nearest you, and perseveringly work on, leaving the wound to time, and it will surely heal. This bit of sermonizing is intended for girls, who imagine it is the "proper thing" to succumb to their first disappointment, and weary themselves and their friends by continually brooding over or talking of their troubles, whereas if they would just give their wounds a good dressing, and then let them alone, their lives would be nobler for their youthful sorrow, and they would prove the truth of Miss Tatham's lines :—

"Who suffers doubly lives,
Who suffers well lives best."

Those who "suffer well" are they who can and do take up their cross, and by bearing its weight, learn how to sympathize with others who are burdened, and so lighten their load. Ah, in after days, when I knew by sad experience how much my mother must have suffered, I also remembered John Chester's words, and proved the efficacy of his remedy.

I was enjoying my visit so much, that Mr. Chester's persuasions induced me to prolong my stay until three months had passed away. Then I went to spend a week or two with Eva. Her husband was a perfect type of a Christian gentleman, and if "marriages are made in Heaven," it must certainly be marriages such as theirs. In their case there was union of heart and of taste, and, above all, a oneness in their Christian life. I spent a very happy time with them. Eva was just the same loving friend whom I had known in my

school-days. None but those who have loved a woman as I loved Eva can understand the quietude that stole over me when I felt her arm encircling me, and her soft breath fanning my cheek. I felt much as a child would feel in the haven of its mother's arms. She used to visit her husband's poor patients, and many a delicacy, made with her own hands, has she carried to some poor suffering child of humanity whose feet were almost touching the borders of the eternal land. On the first Sabbath that I spent with her in her new home we were singing the "Te Deum," after returning from the evening service, and I was watching the happy light that played over her features, when the servant came in, and said—"Please, ma'am, a woman is waiting to see you," and Eva tripped away to discover the errand upon which the woman had come. She came back very soon, and said, "Margaret, dear, just get your hat, and wrap something warm round your shoulders, and come with me." Turning to her husband, she said, "Mrs. Carr is waiting to see me." We left the room, but not before I caught the sweet approving smile he bestowed upon her as she passed out. Soon we were under the quiet light of the stars, and as we walked on, my arm linked in hers, she told me about the woman whom we were going to see. There was no hope for her recovery, so Eva said, but it did not matter, for she was quite prepared to die, and was patiently awaiting the Master's summons. How I envied my friend as she sang "Rock of Ages, cleft for me" to that poor sick woman. Was it because there seemed no rock for me in all that weary land? I know not. I only wondered how it would be with me if I were listening to the last song I should ever hear upon earth—whether the rock would shelter me. I coveted the blessing of that aged pilgrim,

as she prayed with Eva, whose eyes rested upon her with the "dear light of love" in them. When we reached home, Eva did not speak of the pain of death or its sorrow, but laying her hand in that of her husband, she simply said, "She will go home to-night, dear." Was this all? Was dying only going home? Then where would my home be? Again, and yet again, the thought came stealing o'er me on that quiet Sabbath eve, and as I looked into Eva's peaceful, happy face, I wished that I too possessed that "peace which passeth all understanding."

Christmas was rapidly approaching, and I wanted to reach home to spend it with Ralph, for I knew how lonely he would be without me. At last the day on which I had arranged to leave my friends and start for home arrived. John promised to bring Minnie to Southampton some time in the following spring, so I left them with the dawning of a great hope in my heart.

If I could have foreseen what was to happen, if the veil of the future had been drawn aside, should I have wished any portion of the chapter in my life's history, to which that visit was a preface, unwritten? I think not. No paragraph should have been omitted, no dark pages left out, no tears unshed, for they paved the way to the truer light and greater peace in that path which endeth only where all tears shall be wiped away. During my absence Ralph must have been very lonely, for when he met me at the station he strained me so tightly in his arms that he really caused me pain.

Christmas came with its glad joy-bells, happy carols, and its season of innocent mirth. Ralph and I wove our few simple decorations with faltering fingers. A year ago Sunshine's rippling laughter had filled the room with merriment,

as she twined the sprays of holly, with their bright red berries, and saucily teazed Ralph about the mistletoe, or sang sparkling little ditties overflowing with fun and joy. But now—

> "Over all things brooding slept
> The quiet sense of something lost."

Who does not know by experience how the heart aches when the gap at the fireside speaks so forcibly of what is departed? Who has not recalled the "touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that is still," until the very atmosphere has caught the sombreness of their thoughts, and become peopled with the inhabitants of the spirit world, where, thank God! no such thoughts ever find an entrance?

In January our stepmother left us, and Ralph and I were really alone. No need to keep school now, no need to try governessing, but God only knows how gladly I would have done either if I could but have had my father and Sunshine back again. Poverty was bad enough, but when compared with bereavement, it sank into utter insignificance. How long the days seemed! How I used to count the hours of Ralph's absence at the office, as the winter wind moaned drearily through the bare branches of the trees. True, it was endurable with the prospect of a cosy evening in view. But had it not been for those evenings, the daily solitude would have nearly killed me. Ralph and I spent them in singing, reading, or playing chess and bagatelle together, and my love for him strengthened and grew with my life. I often told him that I was quite content to let my love twine round him as the ivy twines round the oak. I even felt that, for his sake, I could love Minnie Chester, and as he was steadily winning for himself a more lucrative position, we

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sometimes talked of how beautiful we would make the house to which he would some day bring her as his bride.

After some time had elapsed, I again commenced writing, to relieve the weary monotony of my life, this time with more success. One after another of my articles appeared, and ere long I received five pounds for a serial story. It was not a long one, but it was well reviewed, and I thus received encouragement to proceed with my literary work. Soon it became a perfect pleasure to write; it was an outlet for my otherwise pent-up thoughts. When John and Minnie paid their promised visit, I had published more than a dozen essays and tales, under an assumed name. I gave Ralph strict injunctions not to mention it to them, and he kept my secret, and by his doing so I learnt a lesson. Two or three days after they came, Ralph and John began to discuss our periodical literature, when John said—"I suppose you have seen the articles in the 'L—— Magazine,' by 'Sweet-briar.' While reading them I was struck by the intricate reasoning they contain, and the sarcastic bearing of many of the leading thoughts. The effect of such writing is likely to be more harmful than good. In fact, I should imagine the authoress to be a woman who is blindly groping for light in the caverns of philosophical reasoning, instead of soaring at once to the true source of all light—the Sun of Righteousness." This, then, was my reward! This was all I had attained. I had published my heart's thoughts for the perusal of men and women, only to discover to them its endless outreachings and gropings for the light which, as yet, it had not found. Why could I not pierce the dark clouds and bask in the effulgence of the light beyond! Oh, what a fallacy is that human teaching which would have us believe that science or

philosophy will quench the thirst of the soul! If it will, whence came the vague unrest which ever possessed me, and imprinted its direful touch even upon my writings?

Calling Ralph and John "old fogies," Minnie turned to me, declaring that she liked the stories very well, for she always skipped the morals and undertones that other people thought so much about.

Ralph successfully endeavoured to change the topic of conversation, and soon we were sitting in a group, merrily discussing all the little details of our every-day life. When our guests had retired, I expected Ralph would say something concerning John's verbal *critique* on my writings, but he did not mention the subject until I said, "Ralph, is it not too bad?"

Then he replied, "I am afraid it is but too true, Pearl." So I pettishly took up my candle, and walked out of the room.

Ralph never bore malice. The next morning he met me in his usual kind way, and never once referred to the occurrence of the previous night. The days that followed were bright in the extreme. Ralph, Minnie, John and I, explored every lane in the vicinity of our house, and occasionally we indulged in the luxury of driving and boating. I drove and rowed with so keen a zest that Ralph used jokingly to say I ought to wear the "unwhisperables." Our boating excursions were full of untold pleasure. We used to pull up the river as far as Woodmill, and then landing, we would wander along its banks, or push our way through the surrounding hazel copses, in an abandonment to glee that was perfectly childish. Afterwards returning to the boat, we glided down with the current whilst Minnie sang Ralph's favourite songs. Though I was happy with Minnie, I think it was because the joy of

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my own life was attaining greater depth and breadth, and not because she was less selfish and superficial. I often wondered why Ralph loved her so much. I admired her exceedingly, but it was only as an artist would admire an almost perfect picture. Ralph never saw the selfishness that prompted her demand for an increased salary, and a pony carriage, ere she would become his wife; he said it was only natural. Ah, he was wrong there! Thank God, it is not *natural* for a woman to barter her love for and stake a man's happiness upon paltry considerations such as these. A true woman lavishes her love upon the object of it naturally and generously. She never dreams of endeavouring to barter away her affection, but *bestows* it with a liberal hand.

Ralph seemed to think it quite right that Minnie should wish to enhance her beauty by the appendages of wealth, declaring that he could wait and work for her as long and as patiently as Jacob served for Rachael, yea, and longer. Was it strange that he should have been so misguided? I trow not. Many men of sound judgment and noble heart have erred in like manner. Therefore I will not judge him.

One day, we all went down to Southsea, and sitting upon the beach there, John Chester told me that old, old tale which is ever new. Oh, the golden dream of first love! Who shall describe it? Truly, it is like a beautiful poem, in its rare, fresh sweetness, and no matter how pathetically the poem ends, if the metre changes from a joyful measure to a long deep wail—the memory of the first deep draught of love returning always. Though the strains of spring-like gladness gave place to a dirge of despair, the remembrance of the prelude is, and ever will be, a joy to me.

I think the memory of the following year will never be

effaced. How I loved you, John, the eye of God only witnessed. And your love for me—why I treasured it and only fairly looked at my treasure when the great world slept. I know you loved me! It was no passing fancy, my beloved! It was heart meeting heart, touching, then passing away from each other. A golden time it was, and if your eye ever glances over these pages, you will know that a woman's heart was as true to you as the needle is to the pole. You were the sun of my life. When I lost you all seemed dark After John and Minnie returned to Ireland, my pen was plied unceasingly, for did I not wish to prove to John that I had found the light for which I had been groping? Yet it was not the light, but a meteor, that had flashed across my path!

I wrote, then, not for money, not for fame, but because life seemed to me a sea of light and love, and I wanted, through my pen, to let others know how brightly the sun shone. Call it rhapsody, if you like. It may have been just the same rhapsody as that in which you indulged ere you ceased to number your summers and count how old you had grown. It may be sentimental, but I am tired of matter-of-fact things, and it does one good to look back upon the days when life's happiness was counted upon rather as an every-day affair than an extra.

John and I corresponded regularly—I have his letters now (they are not tied up with the orthodox blue ribbon), and though they are yellow with age, and so tear-stained as to be almost unreadable, they are still dearly prized—and I learned to love him with an all-absorbing love. Did I believe him perfect? Perhaps I did! I only know that he was true as stars are true, and good and pure as the light. From my heart I thank God that all through the manifold experiences

of life I have had a type so good and brave on which to anchor my faith in manhood.

Working unremittingly as I did, I soon made my name, or rather my assumed name, known in literary circles. Then I received overtures for a complete work from a well-known publisher, and ere another six months had passed, a lengthy story was in the press, and I was correcting my proofs. He published at his own risk, and gave me a royalty upon each copy. True, the sum was small, but was I not taking the first step in my ascent of the ladder of Fame, which ascent I had heard was perilous and difficult even to the most gifted. I felt that if the shafts of criticism were aimed with unerring hand, I had the haven of John's love, and he was all the world to me.

If men could once comprehend the depth of a woman's heart, how they would shrink from desecrating her fair trust in manhood, and how gently they would approach the shrine of her perfect faith, instead of demolishing with stern, uncompromising hand, as they too often do, the beautiful altar she has reared within the citadel of her heart! Even the best of men never obtain entire possession of the key which unlocks the chambers of a woman's soul without causing some amount of suffering to that soul. They enter with firm tread, and sweep with manly dignity chords that need the tenderest, most delicate touch. Yet she whose heart is wrung thereby winces not; she gives no sigh, but smiles on. So John made me writhe. When he wrote of the strong faith reigning in his own breast, and expressed the gratification afforded to him by the knowledge that his "little wife" possessed the same faith, he never noticed how little I did in the soaring line. No, he thought not how I fain would

have soared, but could not, because of my love below. So the dread cloud gathered, and with its leaden hue overspread the sky that so lately had glowed with such bright roseate tints; but I, in my bright trust, never caught the faintest glimpse of the tempest gathering in the horizon, till it burst in all its fury on my head.

John, my John, I exempt you from all blame! But why did you not seek the tried gold, instead of appropriating a piece of ore that as yet had not been tried in the crucible? I thought you would have borne with, instead of scorning my weakness. But I alone was to blame for my unfounded judgment.

CHAPTER XII.

MY book made its *début*, and as I looked at it for the first time in its glory of gold and colour, I wondered what its fate would be; and turning it over in my hand, half wished that I had never written it, but had tried painting or drawing instead of authorship. I had thought that I should be satisfied when my volume came out, but there was still a hungry, restless feeling about my heart because I had not told John. You will wonder, reader, why I had not done so. Ralph was leal and true to me, and he kept my secret well; so that John never even guessed it, as you will see by the following extract from one of the old faded yellow letters before-mentioned:—

"I have inadvertently discovered that the name of the writer who signs herself 'Sweet Briar' is in reality Munro. Is it not strange? Thank God! you do not hold her views, my darling. Her writings are brighter than formerly, but there is the same false metaphor, and though she has evidently found a light, it assuredly is not a light that will play with steady power upon her writings. I believe that it will flash, and gleam, and then, when she least expects it, die out, and leave her in a darkness so dense that it may be felt."

Do you wonder that my happiness was not perfect? My letters to John gradually grew shorter, for I feared to write all I thought and felt, lest I should betray the true state of my mind. I could not give up the hope of becoming his wife!

I could not with my own hand shut all the light and beauty out of my life.

When Ralph had read my book, he implored me to desist from such writing in future, and for several days he went out and came in with a sad, quiet expression on his face that pained me sorely. But my book was well reviewed by the press, and my spirits rose again with the hope that both John and Ralph might look with more favour upon "Sweet Briar's" writings. I half resolved to tell John who she was, but whenever I took up my pen for the purpose of doing so, a lurking dread of his displeasure restrained me. Oh! why did doubts and fears with their phantom fingers constantly clutch at my heart strings? Why did all my happy thoughts, and even the love revealed to me, darken and fade as the spectre Unbelief stood beside me, and breathed upon the beautiful, tender buds of Affection his tainted and sickening odours? A little of the gloom vanished when Ralph introduced to me a young gentleman, whose acquaintance he had recently made.

Percival Egerton's parents were well known as close adherents to everything that was strictly true and honourable, so Ralph unhesitatingly introduced their son to me. I instinctively liked him; I always shall like him. Nothing more! I thought he was good, for his countenance was open and true, and his eyes were clear and frank in their expression, as the windows of the soul should be. He was not handsome—not even good-looking. Indeed, a casual observer might have called him ugly. That, however, he could never be, with those eyes, and the light of intellect which played over his face. I remember distinctly that, as Ralph was introducing us to each other, I noticed his beautiful eyes, with the dreamy sort of pleasure which physical beauty always inspires, and I as dis-

tinctly remember noticing also the weak irresolute lines about his mouth, and the nervous twitching of his lips, as he replied to some remark of mine. As our acquaintance ripened into friendship, I discovered that Percival was endeavouring to lead the life of a Christian, and though weak and yielding in other matters, in this he appeared strong and resolute. In my eyes he was a perfectly frank, open-hearted boy, but weak withal. He would be a man whose life would be marred or made by the woman whom he might in the future choose as his wife. I liked exceedingly the boyish open-ness of character he evinced, and to this day I believe that were he conscious of any wrong-doing he would know no peace of mind. He soon constituted himself my cavalier, and I was pleased enough to have it so. I knew that John would be more grateful to him than otherwise, as his society often saved me from utter loneliness and weariness of spirit. I talked to him of my beautiful sister, who, I tried to believe, had plumed her wings and soared above the clouds of earth to her home beyond; but I said nothing concerning my own tumultuous doubts and perplexities, for I dared not run the risk of impairing in the slightest degree the implicit trust displayed by him in the great Deity. His earnest zeal oftimes touched my very soul, and then I bitterly wondered why my youth was not hopeful and confiding. He introduced me to his mother, and I learnt to love her as I should imagine a child would love a mother whose heart was a well of truth and pure affection. God only knows how I loved that woman. All the ideal affection which I lavished upon the memory of my sainted mother sank into insignificance as compared with the passionate idolatry I bestowed upon Mrs. Egerton. It was quite a different love to that bestowed upon my friend Eva.

I loved Eva as an equal, and a girl, but Mrs. Egerton I loved with a power and depth like unto that with which the martyrs of old loved the truth. In my heart I bowed down and did obeisance to her. Truly, I worshipped her! After a few weeks' acquaintance with her, I found that she was an active member of a religious working community, and then I confided to her the dark despairing doubts that so often assailed me. I told her how I had groped through the dark shadows of earth, ever seeking, yet ever failing to find satisfaction. But her attempts to lead me to the light were as futile as my searches for it had been, so I still wandered wearily on through the mist and the darkness, whilst the death chill of scepticism slowly but surely took hold of my soul. I shall ever remember one evening, when, with no light in the room, and my face buried in my hands, in a perfect agony of doubt, I reasoned thus: of what avail are all my defiant cries against the darkness enshrouding my soul; all my rebellious waywardness, strong reasonings, bitter tears, or vain struggles to reach the light? Surely death must be annihilation! Oh! why is it my doom to live on, to exist, to explore, with the glimmering light of a taper only, the funereal vaults of the soul's dark unbelief? If there is no life beyond—no God, no heaven—then, when death dissolves the feeble link of life, all will be over! There will be no more love, no more sympathy, no more joyous revellings in the beauties of nature; no intellectual pleasure in the newly-revealed fields of science above; no conceptions of the sublime; no wondrous songs of heavenly music. All will be ended. Our researches after knowledge must cease, our aims and intellects pass unsatisfied into nothingness, and we must all go out of existence as do the brute creation. But if there is a

God, if life is but the germ of death, and death the entering upon eternal life, if the soul's doom is fixed by the amount of faith exercised and work accomplished during our earthly probation, then I dared not think what would follow. Oh! who would reveal God to me in his character of love? Though my heart panted for something great, though an undefined longing for something purer and nobler than earth's fancies filled my soul, how could I believe in and work for—I know not what? The labyrinth of doubt and darkness into which I had wandered seemed unending. I could not perceive the faintest loop-hole of escape. Was life a deluding dream? I asked myself. Was the soul merely an intricate piece of mechanism, the movements of which would be stopped by death? My inmost being recoiled at the thought. The idea of my bright, beautiful sister Sunshine being annihilated, was insupportable. Why, if such were the case, I should never see her more, or look upon the faces of my sainted parents again. Oh! fearful thought. Yet I still questioned on, unheeding, or else failing to comprehend the pages of Revelation daily unfolded by the great book of nature. While thus debating and questioning, I was tempted to trust on a fatal prop, and my mind became poisoned with the specious theory of self-salvation. I resolved to work out my own redemption. If works could save me, I resolutely decided that I would be saved; for no devotee of Mammon or Fame should toil more unremittingly than I would. If life was a battle-field, I would fight as the brave soldier fights for the honour of his Queen and his country, and for his birthright—freedom. If it was a probation of endurance and suffering, I would nerve myself with Spartan-like fortitude, which should only be overthrown by grim Death him-

self. I believe it was the unconquerable strength of my will alone that restrained me from indulging in a burst of anguished cries, as, dwelling on possibilities, I in some measure realised how dark life might become to me if John and I were not one in soul, and I yet became his wife. Sternly I grappled with this thought, then nerved myself to bear my secret and struggle alone as best I could, determined John should never know that I often said in my heart, "There is no God!" What a blessing that God in mercy looks with pitying eye upon all who make such resolves as these. Their armour is valueless; their weapons are powerless upon the battle-field of life. Pierced and wounded with many sorrows, they suffer and endure as strong natures only can. It is not the weak, trusting, dependent souls that know life's fiercest warfare, but persons of strong, self-reliant natures, who in their own breasts alone revolve their manifold doubts and fears. It is not the boastful or the shrinking ones who drain the bitterest dregs out of the cup of life, but the self-contained natures, who, in a perfect whirlpool of perplexity and doubt, outwardly give no sign. With untrembling hand they raise the cup of gall and wormwood to their lips, drink it, and smile on.

My wishing to be understood by Ralph or Mrs. Egerton was plainly of no use. But Percival often unconsciously reached and answered my unuttered thoughts. He came in one day, about a week after the evening of which I have been writing, and stretching himself lazily upon our little couch, commenced a series of light, bantering remarks on various subjects. Suddenly his eye fell upon the "S—— Magazine," which was lying upon the table, and he burst forth, "Oh, goodness, Miss Munro! Isn't there an awful article in that

magazine. Its title is 'Fatalism,' and it is written by 'Sweet Briar.' I think 'Upas Tree' would be a decidedly better *nom-de-plume* under which to give circulation to such sentiments as that article contains. Some people declare that it is a woman who writes under the name of 'Sweet Briar.' If it is, all I can say is I think she ought to be hanged. I wouldn't live with such a woman if she were as beautiful as Venus, and as rich as Crœsus into the bargain. Talk about Carlisle's reasonings, and Emerson's atheistic principles unhingeing human reason, why, that woman more than unhinges it! Honest thinker she may be; genius she certainly possesses; but I would rather have the unquestioning, unreasoning faith of a little child than beat with the wings of genius against the battlements of truth as she does, instead of at once scaling them by simple trust in Him who is the fount of Truth. You just read that article, and see if you don't agree with me."

Once more alone, I asked myself—Was it indeed thus? Was I beating against "the battlements of truth," and trying to decipher the mystic lore of bygone travellers' footsteps, instead of commencing at the very foundation, and patiently scaling their heights, until my climbing was consummated in the beams of glorious light which irradiated everything within the sacred enclosure? Was I delving among the gloom and doubts of human reasoning, with only the flickering torch of human teaching in my hand, instead of taking the lamp of God's revealed truth for my guide? My article on "Fatalism" was but a reflection of Emerson's teachings. My views, perhaps, appeared darker and gloomier than his, because unillumined by the light of a genius such as he possessed; but we were both seeking for the truth in

channels of human reasoning, instead of in God, the creator of Truth.

That night I penned another article, and as it was already due at the publisher's, I sat up late that I might complete it. On the pages of manuscript I endeavoured to elucidate the mysteries of our being—of our work and our end. I sketched in glowing colours the life of pleasure we were capable of enjoying, and dwelt long on the subject of the rule we had over our bodies. And when I had finished, amid blinding tears and with aching heart, I laid my head upon the table in a paroxysm of mental anguish, as I called to remembrance the agonized prayer that had escaped my lips so long ago in Clifton Woods, and thought with keenest pain of the peace that followed my prayer. It was a fearful struggle of right with wrong, truth with error. So fierce was it, that even my love for John was banished from my thoughts for the time. But, alas! alas! once more false reason conquered, and truth was the bleeding victim.

Oh, Thou who dost listen to the cry of each one of Thy blood-bought children, listen unto and answer mine, as I pray for strength to write with unfaltering hand the sequel of my life's great love!

CHAPTER XIII.

AS I commence this chapter haunting memories are flooding through my busy brain, and a mournful past stares me recklessly in the face, pointing, whither? Looking back I marvel how I endured that past, and from whence my capabilities of endurance sprang. I tested then the power of a heart to bear and still live on. The very inmost recesses of the soul can be laid bare to the touch of pain, and though bleeding and quivering under the infliction, the heart can still live on and further endure. Superhuman strength is often given under such circumstances, and the fiercest ordeal seems only to rouse into action the latent powers of endurance in the human frame. Who has not proved the truth of this? My sun of earthly love became obscured in blackest night, and around my soul there gathered a dense darkness, which I could ever feel, though I could never explain it.

Through the carelessness of the editor of one of the Magazines to which I contributed, the literary world became possessed of my name, and also the name of the place where Ralph and I resided. The rumour that had reached John's ears long before was to the effect that the Miss Munro who used the *nom de plume* of "Sweet Briar" was a lady of American birth, and I believed the supposed coincidence in the matter of names to have quite passed from his mind. But now he would have to know everything, for already our secluded little home had been visited by some of the leading

literati of the day. Besides this, I felt sure that the press would soon give publicity to the fact that "Sweet Briar" and I were identical.

Tuesday was the day on which John's weekly epistle usually reached me. On the Tuesday following the week in which I had received my distinguished visitors I took the accustomed missive from the postman's hand, and with fear and trembling broke the seal, and commenced the perusal of its contents. It was full of his grand thoughts, eloquent with the reflection of his happiness in having secured my affections, and from beginning to end it breathed of tenderest love for me. I devoured every line with eagerness, and then, with a long-drawn sigh of relief, re-perused it, lingering with wistful eyes upon every expression of tenderness and love. I then replaced it in the envelope, determined to tell him in my next letter that the girl he so fondly loved was none other than the "Sweet Briar" whose writings he so forcibly denounced, and, entreating his forgiveness for not having told him sooner, implore him to love me still. For how could I live without his love? Coward that I was I did not carry out my resolve. I made no mention of the matter when I next wrote to him. I make no excuse for my unprincipled conduct, but if I sinned, I also suffered, and my sufferings were almost greater than I could bear.

As I was returning home after posting my letter, I met the postman, who gave me a letter. Glancing at the superscription, which was in John's firm, manly handwriting, I turned sick with terror, for I instinctively felt that he knew all.

I hurried home; I dared not open it anywhere but in the solitude of my own room. When at last I summoned courage to read it, it seemed impossible that I could live.

For months I could not look at that letter without mentally writhing at its contents. It is lying on the table beside me now, and tears fill my eyes as I think of the poor girl who, years ago, tried in her own puny strength to fight so hard a battle alone and unaided. What were the contents of the letter? A man's plaint who had found himself deceived by the woman upon whom he had bestowed his love: the wail of a heart weak in pain, yet strong in principle, pouring forth the resistless torrent of woe that only a true heart, suddenly wrenched from a thing which it believed to be pure and true, and has found utterly false, can know. He desired me to free him from his engagements to me, but begged me not to return his letters, and concluded with a despairing moan at my having so cruelly deceived him. As I read the letter, I realised that there was no way of return into his heart for me. He wrote:—"Oh, Maggie, imagine the woe of giving to one's own offspring the influence and teachings of an infidel mother. Think how the curse of God would follow me were I to do so. I only pray that I may never look upon your face again. My love! my precious love! How can I give you up? It is the bitterest trial of my life. God in mercy pity us both. I wish I had never taught you to love me for your sake, Maggie, and for my own sake too, for life will be very dark to me now." Life dark to him! It could not be so densely, fearfully blank as it was to me! After the first fearful throes of anguish, life seemed one long, dull pain, which Ralph's love and tenderness had no power to ease. In fact, his caresses tortured me.

If I went out, the light mocked me, and I positively hated the sound of children's laughter. If I remained in-doors the solitude maddened me, and there was a continual gnawing at

my heart, caused by my sense of utter desolation. For months I refused to enter either church or chapel, and my dislike to hear Ralph sing was so intense that he never opened the harmonium, when I was within hearing of it. I loathed the very beauties of nature because they seemed to gloat over and mock my sufferings. Eva wrote to me a letter full of kindly sympathy and love, but a strain of sadness ran through it as she vividly re-called our school days, and the joyous times we had spent together in the never-to-be-forgotten past. Going on to speak of Sunshine, she dared me to think that no heaven had been prepared for her. Oh, Eva, my friend, was not my agony sufficiently great without your adding to it by summoning, in dread array, the things that never could be again?

My heart was so aching and empty that I determined to try if there was a God, and if there was, if He would hear me; so I went to Mrs. Egerton, and told her my story, only reserving John's name. She prayed with and for me, but somehow her prayer never touched my want. She quoted passages of Scripture which might have proved softening and healing to a Christian, but which to me were as brine poured into gaping wounds. I left her with my heart more lacerated than ever, and it was only the tender, womanly grasp of her hand that saved me from utter despair.

The only reply I ever wrote to John's letter was, "Farewell, John. Forgive me for my sin toward you, and please never forget that it was my love for you, and the fear of losing yours, that kept me from telling you who 'Sweet Briar' was. As a lover I would have you forget me, but do not cast me off as a friend." What mattered it to me that the roses bloomed and faded? What cared I that the earth robed

herself in her most glorious apparel, and nightly adorned herself with glistening diamonds? She only mocked at my anguish. How I longed for a mother. True, I had my step-mother living, and I received long, affectionate letters from her at intervals, containing news concerning her own and Tom's welfare, and kind inquiries concerning ours. I wanted, however, a mother who would pillow my weary head upon her breast while I told her all my heart struggles. Perhaps —who knows?—had I possessed such an one, no doubts of God's goodness would ever have crept into my soul. My life might have revolved around hers, and have been a very Beulah of happiness and sunshine. Even if I tried to tell Ralph my sufferings he wouldn't understand. Mrs. Egerton evidently could not comprehend me either, and my pride revolted from the thought of telling Eva, because she was John's sister.

My life had been a painful blank for two months, when Minnie Chester wrote to me. Ralph heard from her regularly, but he never acquainted me with any of the news contained in her letters, excepting when an occasional message was sent expressly for me. In the letter I received from her she expressed herself sorry that I wasn't going to have John, "Because," she went on, "I think it would have been so jolly for us both to have been married together. A double wedding would have been far prettier than a single one." She wound up with the supposition that I "had somebody else on my mind," thus convincing me that John had not told her any particulars concerning the sudden ending of our engagement. I was very glad that Ralph did not ask to see her heartless communication. Lest he ever should do so, I put it on the fire, I am afraid inwardly wishing as I did so

that I could serve the writer of it in a like manner. I hated her for the pitiless way in which she had alluded to my pain. I really wished that she would break her engagement with Ralph, or die. The thought of my noble brother having such a selfish, heartless creature as his wife almost maddened me. If I wronged Minnie in my thoughts it was through her own unfeeling conduct, and because in wishing her engagement to Ralph to end, I had no foreshadowings of the bitterness that would succeed the fulfilment of such a wish, or the blinding tears which would be the price of the freedom I coveted for Ralph.

I resolved to read the Bible carefully from the beginning to the end, and also to seek work to do both in the world and the church—such as would ultimately bring about my salvation. Fully bent on this, I laid my plans accordingly, and without delay commenced trying to carry them into practice. I went to our pastor, and telling him that I wished to do something toward the work of my life, I requested him to give me a class in the Sabbath School. This he refused to do in the following emphatic words :—" God forbid that I should ever allow you to teach and train the minds of the little ones in our school, as you are endeavouring to teach and train the public mind. If you will leave behind the fallacies you have hitherto been teaching, and with the simple faith of a little child, trusting in the merits of Christ alone for redemption, enter the church militant, come and teach, and may God assist you. But if not, if you do not so enter, your work amongst them would be more likely to wreck than save the children's souls." I took my departure from the house with haughty steps, and proudly defiant spirit, asking myself how dared he speak to me thus, when I had so far conquered

myself as to resolve to forego the pleasure of Ralph's society on Sunday afternoons, and offer to teach a lot of dirty, unruly children in a close, stifling atmosphere. The idea of his refusing my proffered aid in the school, as if I were of no use to anyone but Satan! (If, indeed, such a being existed.) Plainly I was known to him as "Sweet Briar." I went home, but made no mention of my visit to Ralph. Here was more fruit of my dark unbeliefs. As far as soul converse was concerned, our sweet communion with each other was, and for months had been, at an end. Though dwelling under the shelter of the same roof, we were strangers in spirit, and my unhappiness was making Ralph unhappy on my account. I was often miserable—so miserable that I could not look forward into the future without a feeling of sickening dread. I have lived long enough now to have found that with all lives there is much sorrow intermingled, and that with all love there is a strange commingling of pain, but the pain of those whose souls are anchored upon shifting sand is heightened and increased by the restlessness of their lives.

The days moved on, bringing their changes. When I first became affianced to John, I wondered what had so altered my face. It had lost all its sallowness, and looked bright and happy. Now my complexion was sallower than ever, and my heavy eyes, with the dark circles beneath them, increased my wretched plainness of appearance, until I hated to see the reflection of my face in the glass, and quite wondered that Ralph could bear to look at me.

Percival Egerton's grief was unbounded when he discovered that the article which he had so denounced was from my pen, and his eyes were humid with tears as he said,

"Only to think of your writing it. I never dreamt of the possibility of your either thinking or writing such fearful things." And then he talked in his own simple, trusting way of God's wonderful redemption through Christ. His words quieted and soothed my turbulent spirit, and I begged him to remain my friend. He laughed his low, pleasant laugh, and reaching out his hand, exclaimed, "Friends always, Maggie! Shake hands upon it. I can't possibly spare you from my list of friends, though I warn you I am a sworn enemy to your writings, and shall war against them to the utmost of my powers. Is it a bargain?" I answered, "Yes," and friends we ever were after that.

Percival really lightened my burden, and in some degree rendered my life endurable, and my liking for him grew and strengthened. Once—and only once—we talked of John. Then I told him that I exempted John from all blame. I do more than that now. I glory in the thought of having loved and been beloved by a man whose love of truth and principle was strong enough to allow him to put earthly happiness from him with resolute hands, in token of his faith in his Heavenly Father.

Month after month passed away. Then Ralph expressed a wish that I should ask Minnie to visit us again, saying, "I hope it will be her last visit, and that the next time she comes it will be as my wife." Only for his sake I would have fled anywhere rather than have met Minnie, for would she not be to me a continual reminder of what I had lost? However, I resolved to be brave, and ere long Minnie was once more our guest. She tormented me concerning John, and plied me with eager questions as to the true reason of our broken troth. "Is there anyone else on the boards? Is

he rich? What is his name? When are you going to be taken in and done for?" These questions she put, one after another, without giving me time to reply, had I been disposed to do so. Then she called me a little sceptic, and informed me that John had "quite raved over" my writings before he knew that they were mine, and declared that when she and Ralph were married she would have their marriage announced in the newspapers—"Ralph Munro, brother of the talented authoress of "The Ideal World," "The Unknown," and other valuable works, to Minnie, youngest daughter of John Chester." And I listened to all she said with a quiet smile upon my lips, and a steady gnawing pain at my heart.

When Percival opened our little gate on the following day Minnie and I were sitting at the window. Hearing the click of the latch, she glanced up and immediately exclaimed, "Oh, Maggie, see the conquering hero comes, faultlessly arrayed in the finest of broadcloth, and the most spotless of linen, and light kid gloves! No wonder you tossed poor John over. But, who knows? perhaps I can cut you out, though I certainly make no pretensions to being intellectual." I had no time to reply to her jesting speech before Percival entered the room. Truly Minnie would not have found it difficult to "cut out" anyone, with her bewitching loveliness of face and form. During his visit his eyes were continually upon her. She was arrayed in a pretty white morning dress, her waist encircled with a girdle of the palest blue, and her wealth of sunny hair, a portion of which had escaped from its imprisonment and fell on to her shoulder in long glittering ringlets, was gathered into a careless knot at the back of her queenly head, and confined with a pretty golden arrow. When Percival went I accompanied him to the gate, and

could not refrain from saying, "Don't you think Minnie very beautiful?" To my surprise, he replied, "Though not so beautiful as hers, your face is infinitely more dear to your friends than Miss Chester's can ever be. To me she looks as if her character lacks depth." Why did he not keep that opinion? Would that at a subsequent period his thoughts had been the same, and yet—

> God hath His mysteries of grace—
> Ways which we cannot tell:

what we know not now we shall know hereafter.

I was working hard now. Already our home was unique with beautiful works of art, and I had purchased a piano, which was introduced into our little parlour with very great difficulty. (I could not leave the spot where father and Sunshine had dwelt, or I should have taken a larger house.) So when wearied with writing I used to sit for hours playing, cheerfully or mournfully, just as it accorded with my mood. Sometimes I played over the hymns and songs endeared to me by childish associations, or by the memory of Fred's happy voice. Poor Fred! What an affectionate boy he was! Not so firm as he ought to have been, but so loving! How often my fingers wandered over the keys, and played a loving requiem for him in his ocean bed. Once we were an almost unbroken family, and now only Ralph and I remained. I sat one afternoon thinking thus, when suddenly a thought of Tom entered my mind, and I resolved to write and ask him to come and pay us a visit as soon as Minnie returned home. Meantime I enlisted Percival's sympathies and services to procure various amusements for him when he should come. The old days came back to my memory with startling vividness as I told him of Tom's boyish proclivities, and of the

dislike I had always manifested as a child to the fat boy of my early days.

Minnie's visit did not afford me the slightest amount of pleasure, therefore I will not dwell upon it. We went to several pic-nics, where we met the *élite* of the neighbourhood. At one of them we found Mrs. Sylvester, who was peculiarly gracious, assuring me that she had always predicted that with my *very proper* spirit I should be able to rise superior to my sometime poverty. As I haughtily bowed in recognition of the praise she bestowed upon me, did she catch the same passing glimpse of another scene which I did—a scene in which a heartless, purse-proud woman had taunted a poor girl with her "proud poverty," and given her the first insight into the spirit of cruelty which can animate one woman in her intercourse with another. As I looked upon the two pretty, interesting girls standing beside her, I thought of my blood-stained finger-nails, and of the five pounds which I had left in utter scorn upon her schoolroom table, and I laughed in bitter derision at the way in which the tables had been turned. My fame was spreading, my obscurity and poverty were things of the past, so she could afford to be gracious to me. She, the once domineering mistress, now condescended to court the favour of the very woman whose spirit she had at one time tried her best to break. On almost every side I received laudation; but from whence I most desired it none came. The wreath of fame was on my brow, the chaplet I had coveted was mine, yet it only adorned a weary, aching head. It did not, it could not, satisfy my heart, which was continually crying out, "Give! give! not fame or wealth, but something more satisfying—some rare, imperishable good." I had thought fame would satisfy me; but though it is very

fair to look upon, there is ever a canker-worm at its core. "Would that I had never touched a pen, if these are the results," I cried, "if my writings touch no hearts, and only earn for me the praise of flattering tongues, that in their turn will be employed in sounding the praises of my rivals!"

CHAPTER XIV.

MORE than eighteen months passed away, and if lives are measured by heart-beats, I lived an age in that short space of time. I did not forget John Chester, but the sense of loss gradually lessened, and I became reconciled to my life.

I employed my pen very little during those months; when I did so my writings took the form of "Tales for Children," "History Simplified," or "Volumes of Nursery Lore," which were penned for money. I had quite relinquished the higher and deeper subjects which I had formerly handled so recklessly, and waited for the time when the Holy Spirit's teaching should make plain to me those things which, as yet, I so imperfectly understood. Yes, I thank God I was only waiting until the breaking of the day should scatter the darkness enshrouding my understanding. Would the light come? God knows how earnestly I prayed for and sought it, and He was leading me by a way which, though I knew it not, was the right way.

Meanwhile, Percival Egerton asked me to be his wife, and I refused. Although I had never for a moment contemplated such a *dénouement*, it did not startle me. I liked him very much indeed, and valued his friendship accordingly, but I could not be his wife, and I told him so, pleading that the friendship existing between us might remain unbroken. For a short time subsequent to this he was rather quieter and more distant in his bearing toward me, but, by degrees, we relapsed into our old friendly relationship with each other.

My writings at that time did not produce in me the excitement consequent upon former efforts of my pen. There were no slashing reviews or flattering editorials to read concerning my "latest papers," nor visits from admiring readers. Occasionally some editor took it into his head to inform the public, through the medium of the press, that he was perfectly astonished at the deterioration in the writings of "Sweet Briar," and wondered that she should issue such babyish productions, when some impudent wag would retort that probably she was married, and, therefore, considered baby talk the most suitable for that phase of life. With these exceptions my life was extremely quiet and monotonous; wearisomely so at times.

One bright afternoon I started for Mrs. Egerton's house, intending to return home in the company of Ralph and Percival in the evening. I found her bearing toward me rather altered, and, ere I had been with her long, she broached the subject of my literary work, remarking, "What a pity it is, Pearl, that you have so quickly lost caste among the reading public." I was slightly surprised to hear such a speech from the lips of a professing Christian, for I had not then learned how many persons have the profession of godliness without the power. After we had talked upon the matter for some time, and I had explained my reasons for discarding my former style of writing, I took my leave of her, and walked in the direction of the office where Ralph was engaged. When I reached it I found that he had left for home, accompanied by Percival, so, of course, I had no alternative but walking home alone, which I proceeded to do with as little delay as possible. What I suffered during that homeward walk I can never

explain. The past stood before me like a panorama. I saw Sunshine as she appeared when she and I wandered under those grand old trees for the first time. I saw again my father's look of rapt admiration as he gazed upon the beauty of the place, and then I thought of John, and pictured him until he seemed to be really beside me again, looking into my face with eyes that beamed with love for me, as he did in the days when we trod that pathway together, and my heart was bounding with hope and joy.

Now, instead of my father's and Sunshine's presence, I had a grave stone in the quiet cemetery, and instead of John's love, I had his abhorrence of my deceit, and the tormenting thought that another woman might even then possess the place in his affections which once had been mine. Eva had never once mentioned his name in her letters to me since the cancelling of our engagement, and sometimes all kinds of wild improbabilities concerning him floated through my brain. I never for a moment thought that he *might* forgive and forget the past, for had he not said, "You can never be my wife?" I worked myself into such an agony, that when I reached home I was literally choking with emotion. I opened the door very quietly, and entered the house, which was so still that I concluded that Ralph and Percival, on finding I was out, had gone off for a stroll. It was almost dark as I entered our little parlour, and sinking upon the floor, and burying my face in the cushions of an arm-chair, I sobbed aloud—

"Oh! for a mother to kiss my burning forehead! Oh! for Sunshine's winsome caresses! What shall I do? How can I bear it?"

Involuntarily, I uttered these thoughts aloud, and sud-

denly I felt a loving kiss pressed upon my brow, an arm was thrown tenderly round me, and I was, I supposed, weeping upon Ralph's breast, when I was startled by the voice of my supporter. It was not Ralph's voice, but Percival's, and when my first surprise had passed, he soothed and comforted me, afterwards earnestly pleading for the right to comfort me always. While I sat in the silent glooming and listened, with the ghost of the dead past at my side freezing me with its icy breath, and "counted the cost" of living a lonely life, with it for my sole companion, shrinking with all my woman's nature from the thought of a lonely, loveless existence, and feeling that, next to Ralph, Percival was best beloved by me, I dared to face the future as his wife. So, that night, I became the promised bride of Percival Egerton. Of course, I did not feel the same deep love and joy as that which glorified my betrothal to John Chester, but there was no foreboding and no pain, so that I grew content; for there is nothing so comforting to a woman's heart as the love of a good, true man. Mrs. Egerton was evidently displeased at the engagement existing betwixt her son and myself, and was continually urging me to "write for fame, and take a prominent position in the world." Ralph was not very well pleased with my choice, but he did not interfere, further than to remark that Percival was "not sufficiently intellectual to be a fit companion for me for life." However, with these exceptions, the course of our love ran very smoothly, and I grew happier than I had been since the receipt of John's last letter. We had been affianced three months, when Tom paid us a visit. He brought the intelligence that our step-mother was about to be married, and that she would like me to act as bridesmaid, and she also

wished Ralph to be present at the ceremony, and would take no denial, so Tom said. Of course we decided to comply with her wishes, and the excitement of preparation was a pleasant break in the monotony of our daily life. I chose and ordered my dress for the occasion with feelings of more than ordinary pleasure. If you went to my wardrobe you would find the dress there now—a very pale blue silk, richly trimmed with Honiton lace, and with it you will find the wreath of faded flowers, but they will tell you nothing of the darkness and pain that came to me subsequent to the wearing of them. I sometimes, even now, look at them with lingering fondness, because of the admiration they elicited from Ralph and Percival. When I received them from the dressmaker's hands, with a woman's vanity, I attired myself in them, and then ran down stairs to exhibit myself to Ralph, to find Percival there also. They both pronounced the costume bewitching, declaring that I should not change it until I had played Mendelssohn's "Wedding March." After many ineffectual attempts to escape, I sat down to the piano and swept my fingers over the keys, filling the room with the joyous strains. I cannot tell how it was, but suddenly to me, all the joyousness died out of the music, and to my ears it sounded like a death wail, making my fingers powerless. So, turning round, I nervously said, "I think I must be haunted, for every note sounds like a cry of woe." Ralph laughed heartily at what he termed my fanciful ideas, and, touching my dress, told me to go and take it off, saying lightly that perhaps I should feel better then, for he had heard that it always made a woman feel nervous to have on wedding attire. Percival drily observed that he thought it was only when she had it on for her own

wedding, and expressed a hope that I should soon be nervous in that fashion. Do coming events cast their shadows before them? I know not, but I shivered as he spoke. Just at that moment Tom came in from the garden, and catching sight of me he exclaimed, "By Jove! what a bride!" and, stretching his arms across the doorway, as I attempted to pass, he demanded toll from "Mrs. Egerton." Again I shivered, and this time so perceptibly that both Ralph and Percival noticed it, and inquired if I was cold. The following day we were at a pic-nic, and Percival's mother was there also. Her bearing towards me was cold and repellant in the extreme, so I strolled away with Percival, and we enjoyed a pleasant hour beneath the shadow of some beautiful old lime trees. The pleasant perfume of the blossoms filled the air, and the surrounding scenery was charming.

Percival was speaking of his love for me, and I remember he quoted, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it," and to that unquenchable love he compared his affection for me, and rapturously exulted in the thought of having won me. I also have a vivid recollection of his repeatedly assuring me that if he had not won my love he would never have called any woman by the name of wife; and I listened to it all, and believed him, and, so believing, a great calm fell upon me, and my liking for him grew and strengthened. I know I did not *love* him, but the deep regard which I had for him might in time have deepened until it grew into that eternal love which even death itself destroyeth not. It was not to be so, however. The same evening my troubles began; Mrs. Egerton requested me to release Percival from his engagement to me for the space of

a year, after which time, if we still loved each other, it was to be renewed. This I absolutely refused to do, and retaliated by asking her why she had encouraged our intimacy at its commencement, and then so entirely changed when it had culminated in a matrimonial engagement. First she argued and reasoned with me, then coaxed and stormed, and ultimately the reason of her changed view of the matter became plain to me. When her son and I first became friends she had made inquiries respecting our family, and during her researches some faint rumours to the effect that I was "Sweet Briar" reached her ears. She then wrote to the publisher of the magazine in which my articles appeared from time to time, and solicited the favour of "Sweet Briar's" real name. Of course, the publisher referred her to the editor, and he, very properly, refused her the information she sought. Her attempts at discovery, in that quarter, proving futile she next inquired at the circulating library where I obtained my books, as to the class of literature which I usually read. The librarian supplied her with the names of my favourite authors, and helped to confirm her in the idea that "Sweet Briar" and I were one person, and, very soon afterwards, the fact that such was the case became public. Now, this woman was a professing Christian, and yet, when it suited her purpose, she could do everything in her power to ruin my love, and afterwards coolly lay plots to cause me unhappiness and misery. She knew perfectly well that my first writings were calculated to shake men's belief in the Godhead, and yet she could urge upon me to continue that style of writing for the sake of the fame which it won for me. What did it matter to her, that my soul was in darkness, and that unbelief enshrouded my whole being, warping all good, and hardening my nature, if

England rang with my name, and laid the crown of Fame at the feet of her son's wife? She cared not, though she was a mother, and *called* herself a Christian. She urged me to recommence writing in my old style, in order, forsooth, that I might make for myself a name, under cover of which she might glory. It was not even on her son's account she desired it, but merely to gratify her own paltry ambition.

With burning indignation I heaped reproaches upon her, and upon myself also. Upon her for her falseness, and upon myself for having so implicitly trusted in her, and exclaimed, "Perish the thought that I should so sell myself! God forbid! When I was winning a name for myself, I was doing it honestly, for then I believed what I wrote, therefore no falsehood lurked around the honour which I won; but now my views were changed, and my soul recoiled from the thought of an action so mean and dastardly, as would be writing what might imperil the souls of my fellow beings who were struggling through the 'Slough of Despond,' merely for the sake of the fame which such writing might bring to me."

Then my mood changed, and I pleaded, for Percival's sake, that she would not interfere between us, but let matters quietly take their course. She turned a deaf ear to all my entreaties, however, and, still scheming to terminate our engagement, scornfully asked me if I wanted to marry her son for the sake of the wealth and position which would be mine, as his wife. How my haughty spirit writhed, as I angrily retorted, that a day would come when position, higher than he could ever bestow, should be mine, as the reward of my own hard toil; telling her that, to me, wealth was a paltry consideration, and that it had not the slightest power to sway me in my decision. Proudly, as though it was

for ever photographed upon my heart and brain, do I remember the supercilious expression of her countenance, as she listened to my passionate protestation: even the arrangement of the furniture, and the pattern of the carpet on the floor of the room we were in, stand out as clearly in my memory as though it had all happened only yesterday—but she deigned me no reply, and with a heart bursting with scorn and indignation I turned and walked out of the room. Ralph and Percival were talking together in the hall, and their gay laughter sounded to my ears as one might imagine the merry peal of marriage bells would sound to a newly-made widow.

Ralph and Tom bade adieu to Mrs. Egerton without the slightest suspicion of the storm that had so lately raged, and soon Percival was escorting me home. I said not a word to him concerning what had transpired between his mother and myself, because I thought it wrong to engender any feeling of bitterness in him towards his mother, besides which, I argued that most likely, at some future day, she would be my mother-in-law, and as such she would claim my reverence and respect. He complained of my silence and coldness, but he did not know how my pride was rebelling against the words which I had so recently borne for his sake. I say for his sake advisedly, for I believe that in my indignation I should recklessly have put from me his love had I not thought of the suffering which my doing so would entail upon him.

CHAPTER XV.

When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions.

In faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange,
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful.

NOTHING but the memory of my darling Ralph's beautiful life, and grand submission, coupled with love for the Master whom he served, could give me strength to pursue my story.

Ralph, Tom, and I started for Newcastle the day previous to that fixed for the marriage of my step-mother, intending to return home on the day after the ceremony had taken place. Let me linger for a little while over that period, for it was the last time my Ralph was full of health and vigour. My step-mother's *fiancé* was the vicar of the parish, and, though an old bachelor over sixty years of age, his manner was very kind and pleasant, and we received a hearty welcome at the Vicarage, where we spent the evening on the day of our arrival. We had tea on the lawn, and all took our share in the preparation. Merry laughter and happy voices rang out, and mingled with the songs of the birds, until the lengthening shadows drove us into the house.

The next morning rose bright and roseate, and for the first time in my life, I witnessed the performance of the marriage ceremony, and listened with a chill of awe to those solemn words, "Till death do us part," which bind man and wife.

Though it was no blooming maiden, but a middle aged woman, who was uttering those words, and linking her fate with that of the man, and he an old one, who had chosen her as his companion for life, still I heartily prayed that God would bless them. Then I heard the officiating clergyman say "Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder," and began to comprehend what a solemn thing marriage is. A moment more and the bells were ringing out a merry peal, and white-robed maidens were strewing the path of the bridal pair with flowers, while a crowd of school children, to whom my mother and the vicar had endeared themselves, made the air ring again with happy shouts, as they re-entered the carriage. There was a party in the evening, and merry tripping feet made the hours fly fast, so that it was early morning ere we retired to rest. At three o'clock the following afternoon we bade adieu to a happy, laughing group, Tom being prominent among them, in his emphatic declaration that he would begin saving up all his old shoes for my wedding; and soon Ralph and I were dashing along *en route* for Southampton as fast as steam could take us. When we reached Basingstoke we had to change, and had barely two minutes to get our luggage transferred and cross to the other platform. Ralph put me into a compartment and then went to look after the luggage. I was afraid the train would start before he returned, and not without reason, for in a moment it was on the move. With one bound I gained the platform and looked around for Ralph, but could not see him anywhere. I had just made inquiries of a porter, when my attention was attracted to a group of persons, among whom were five or six men, who appeared to be carrying a heavy burden. No thought of evil

crossed my mind, and I hastened on until I saw that which made my heart give a great bound and then stand still. God help me! it was a sight never to be forgotten, and yet after the first great start, I never flinched. It was Ralph, my precious brother, my best beloved upon earth, lying upon a door or plank, his face white and drawn with anguish, and his lips set as if the seal of death was upon them. I cannot write more of the sickening anguish, and the hopes down-trodden; it was only one of the many, very many cases that fill this world of ours with woe. My brother was not dead; he had slipped from the edge of the platform, and whilst endeavouring to regain his footing, had been struck with fearful force by an engine. His back received the blow, and the spine was injured. He was speedily removed to an hotel and I immediately telegraphed to London for a noted physician, in the meantime taking advice from one near at hand. Soon Ralph regained consciousness, and when the London physician had arrived, and held a consultation with two resident medical men, he insisted upon knowing the full extent of the injuries which he had sustained, and elicited the information that at the present his spine was paralyzed by the violent blow he had received, and it was that which caused the almost total absence of pain. After an interval it would cause him intense suffering, which, if it did not cost him his life, would render it one of complete helplessness. What cannot the heart bear and live! If such a fiat had gone forth concerning me, I think I could have endured it better than that it should have been my darling's fate. I sat by his bed-side all through the dreary watches of that night. He never once removed his hands from his face or spoke. God alone knows what he suffered during those long weary hours. I

think, however, I shall never forget his face, as I saw it when the morning broke, and he looked up into mine. It was the face of a man who has fought a battle and conquered, yet retains the scars as an everlasting remembrance of his victory. The expression of pain never quite left it, till the angel of death kissed it into oblivion. Looking mournfully into my face he said very softly, "*It's past*, Maggie; you must let Minnie know."

I knew he referred to the struggle for submission, to the trouble which had come upon him, so I made no remark.

Then the white lips moved again and he said, "You know, Pearl, it is the Lord, let him do as seemeth Him good." I listened, and strange to say, my heart did not rebel; was I catching the sweet spirit of submission breathed from my brother's lips? I think I was! I wrote to Eva requesting her to break the news to Minnie, and then I wrote to Percival. Poor Percival! I had kept him in suspense all the time, for he was awaiting in Southampton our arrival. Two days later, he and his mother were with us at Basingstoke, and Mrs. Egerton was assisting me to nurse Ralph. In my great grief, I forgot all her former unkindnesses, and was intensely grateful for her sympathy. In the course of the week, I heard from Eva, who said that Minnie was coming to us as soon as possible, and that John would bring her. So John and I met again. Met with a friendly shake of the hand, a few passing words of sympathy, and the first chapter of my life's best love was ended, *for ever!*

Mrs. Egerton, Percival, and Minnie, were all untiring in their attentions to Ralph, but pain still seemed to be my portion. As Ralph's helplessness became a certainty, Percival continually pressed me to consent to our immediate

marriage, in order (as he said) that he might have the right to be always with us. I did not feel justified in doing this, for my brother's sufferings made him very dependent upon me, therefore I entreated Percival to wait at least a year. He said he thought that I was very unreasonable, and in which opinion Mrs. Egerton *professed* to coincide. Ralph implored me not to delay my marriage on his account, but his pale face contradicted his loving words.

Exactly three weeks after the accident, Percival and his mother left us, accompanied by Minnie Chester, who had accepted their invitation to spend a month with them. I did not witness the parting 'twixt Ralph and Minnie. She came out of his room with a sorrowful face and tear-stained eyelids.

When I entered the room he said with a sad pitiful smile "The bitterness of death is past." Ah! my brother, it is not *death* which holds the dregs of bitterness, they are contained only by *life*. Percival parted with me very constrainedly, remarking that my professed self-sacrifice was nought but lack of love for him, or else it was a disinclination to marry him. His unkind construction of my conduct did not mar my own sense of right in the course I had adopted, for which I thanked God, who alone knew the depth of my love for Ralph.

It seemed strange, but after the storm there came the "clear shining," and I began to fear the Lord—not love, but fear—the beginning of the end!

For months I watched and tended Ralph, and then the peace born of continual intercourse with him was broken. Percival was a very indifferent correspondent, but from the scant communications I occasionally received from him, I gathered the fact that he did not love me as of yore. I began to wonder how long he intended to wait ere he visited

us again. Then came the final stroke. His mother wrote requesting me to free him from his engagement to me, urging his youth, his unformed judgment, and the almost invariable misery of those who too early entered into rash engagements, as her reasons for making such a request of me.

I have the letter still; it is full of unwomanliness and heartlessness, a letter which a woman could not be capable of writing if she were good. For a time it almost destroyed my faith in womanhood, and I laughed to scorn the idea of truth and purity dwelling in the sex of which Mrs. Egerton formed one. My girlhood's friend Eva was the only person who saved my faith in woman from total shipwreck. I wrote to her relating my story without the slightest reservation. Next I wrote to Mrs. Egerton, a letter brimming over with bitter scorn, informing her that all my woman's pride revolted at the idea of holding any man to an engagement that had become irksome to him, for I held that the only gift, worthy of acceptance, which a man could bestow on a woman, was love. I awaited her reply, but none came, and as the days dragged wearily away, I grew heart-sick with the dread of some impending evil. It came! My presents to Percival had been but few, a pair of slippers, a watch guard, and a few articles, such as women delight to work, when regard is woven in with every stitch. These came back to me and also my letters. As I opened the package a stony feeling of despair took possession of me; was I unworthy to be loved? or *was the hand of God against me?*

That night I prayed; I did more, I wrestled with God to give me back Percival's love. I felt sure there was treachery at work. I was confident that he loved me, or had done so, and so for months I wept, and prayed, and waited, hoping for his return, but he came not, and no tidings of him

reached me. Ah! I did not know then that it was in infinite wisdom that my Heavenly Father refused to grant my passionate petitions, though I feel that it was so now, for Percival was no fit mate for me. Even love cannot make up for the lack of strength of character in a man. But at that time I prayed, and agonized for Percival's love, for life was getting very dark for me. I had no one to love me but Ralph, and he—God help me! was passing away. After an interval of months, I heard that Minnie Chester was still with the Egertons, and then rumours of the marked attentions paid to her by Percival and the manner of her reception of them reached me. As a last resource I decided upon writing to Minnie in the hope that she would not prove devoid of all feeling. Accordingly I did so, and implored her, unless she loved Percival, not to seek to win his love, and endeavoured to make her understand how blank and desolate my life would become if he ceased to care for me, schooling myself to await with patience her answer. I told Ralph no word of my struggle until that answer came. Then I told him all, for her reply was brief and curt—"I do not love Percival, but enjoy exerting my power over him." The words burnt into my brain, for they meant *no hope* for me. I was surprised at the quiet manner in which Ralph received my tidings. Alas! the cause was soon explained. He was lying upon the couch one evening, and I was sitting beside him, his hand clasped in mine, when he suddenly spoke. "Pearl, sing, 'Jesus, lover of my soul.' I sang, till I came to the lines—

> "Other refuge have I none,
> Hangs my helpless soul on Thee,
> Leave, ah! leave me not alone,
> Still support and comfort me."

When I had finished them the hot tears rushed to my eyes, and I exclaimed, "Ah! Ralph, I wish Jesus was my friend, for truly 'other refuge have I none.'" He made answer, "Pray for it, darling, and He will surely be your friend. Ah! Pearl, if your troubles lead you to Jesus, you will have cause to rejoice that they came." Then I prayed aloud for the first time in my life, entreating God for submission and peace. I no longer pleaded for my own way, but for submission to His will, and there came to me a great calm, so great that my spirit was overawed by it. I felt as though no trials would ever have power to move me from my refuge. We sat hand in hand in the quiet gloaming till night's mantle fell softly over the earth. A few trees outside the house were swaying their branches to and fro in the twilight, with a low mournful sound, as if they were grieving for their departed glory. The autumn wind was sweeping through them, as if heralding the approach of winter. I said, "Ralph, we shall soon have Christmas here again. I wonder if you will be better by that time. Do you think we shall be able to return to Southampton by slow stages, when the spring comes?" The answer came, hesitatingly, and it was very different to that which I anticipated. "I shall never see spring again, Pearl, save in the land of eternal spring."

Then from my heart rose the bitter cry, "If this be true, be merciful, oh, God! and take me also;" but outwardly I calmly replied, "You are surely mistaken, dear, you must stay with me; oh, Ralph! live for my sake, darling, or I cannot exist."

"Sister Pearl, I asked the doctor this morning, and he said that a month, or at the very longest, two, will end my pain; and it is better so, my sister, for here my life is one of

continual suffering and endurance, there the inhabitants never say, 'I am sick.'" I felt that it was well, but my lips refused me utterance, and my eyes refused me the relief of tears.

Ralph seemed glad, as the days passed away one by one, glad because of the great change so soon awaiting him. As for me I could not sleep. My spirit knew no rest. My heart seemed breaking. I disguised my feelings so well that he knew it not. I was with him continually, singing to, or talking with him. On the Sabbath before Christmas day, he entered through the pearly gates, to the Celestial City. He did not die, my precious brother; God giveth his beloved sleep, and he gave it to Ralph. On the day when he went from me, I was happier than I had been for weeks. He was looking so much better, and had eaten more heartily than usual. We were sitting, after our usual fashion, hand in hand, listening to the glad bells, which were summoning worshippers to the house of God. Ralph suddenly exclaimed, "Listen, Pearl, to those carol singers; their song is like angel music, it is so sweet." I strained my ears, but could catch no sound, so I answered not a word, thinking that perhaps his keen ear had caught the song of the distant worshippers. It was a peaceful day to me. No thought of Percival or Minnie obtruded itself upon me. After tea I sang hymn after hymn to Ralph. I was about to close the piano, when he entreated, "Just one more, Pearl. Sing 'God of my Life.' So I sang that beautiful hymn of Doddridge's. When I reached the concluding verses Ralph joined in, and as I looked upon him, his face seemed almost transfigured.

Oh, Ralph, my brother, I dare not mourn, but my heart aches sadly as I write this part of my story.

After we had finished the hymn, I drew his couch up

toward the fire, and read to him. About half an hour passed thus, then he said, "It is getting very dark, isn't it, Pearl?" I answered. "No, dearie, the lamp is burning very brightly. Perhaps you miss the gas. When we get back to Southampton"—There the words died upon my lips, for I saw something strange about his face. Hastily ringing the bell, I desired that someone might be immediately despatched for the doctor, then resumed my seat beside Ralph, who said:

"How sweetly they are singing!"

"Whom, dear?"

"The carol singers." (Was it the angels you heard, my brother, for no earthly song reached my ears?)

"Do listen, Pearl, I think they are singing the song of the Lamb."

Then another pause.

"Is Minnie here, Pearl?"

I said "No," thinking his mind was wandering.

"Tell her that I loved her till death, dear, and prayed that God would ever bless her."

I could not speak, and his dear hand groped for my face. I laid it softly against his, and he kissed me, then turning his head upon his pillow, he lay quite still like a sleeping child. The doctor came, but his arrival did not arouse him. A few more hours and all would be over. There might be a few brief moments of consciousness, should he awake, and then he would leave me alone in the world. I yearned to have his last words and looks to myself, so begged the doctor to leave me alone with him. Two hours passed then, he opened his eyes and said, "Good-bye, my Pearl, it is getting dark." Suddenly the film on his eyes seemed removed, and bright, beautiful, and eager, he sat up on the couch, the first time

since his accident, and gazed, not at me but at the end of the room, then with a glad cry of "Father," and "Angels," his spirit took flight with them. I know not how the day passed, until I took my last look at the dear, beautiful face, now more beautiful than ever, and knew that the spirit of my brother was with God.

My step-mother, Tom, John Chester, Eva and her husband, came to the funeral, and then I was left quite alone, but God was not far from me, and from the grave of my darling brother sprang undying love for his and my Heavenly Father. I learnt to love the hand that dealt the blow, and a peaceful and deep joy filled my heart. I lost my will in God's. My life and its purpose were changed. I did not mourn for one of the brightest links that bound my soul to heaven, for the grandest link in the great chain has said, "I will not leave you comfortless," and so I was comforted.

CHAPTER XVI.

TWELVE years have passed away since God gave my brother sleep. Eleven years have fled since John Chester married a girl whose character, like an opening rose, was full of beauty and fragrance. The same period has elapsed since Percival Egerton and Minnie Chester became man and wife. My youthful loves are only memories now. Tom has passed several high class examinations most successfully, and bids fair to occupy a place in the world of which he will yet be proud. I have a quiet little home in Devonshire, and he often finds his way thither. I believe he has a very strong feeling of attachment to his step-sister, which is strongly reciprocated by her. A year subsequent to Ralph's death, I published a book entitled "Imprisoned Sunbeams." In the newspaper which contained the first review of my work, I read the following announcements :—

CHESTER—D'ALBAINE.—At St. Mary's, John Chester, Esq., of Merrick Square, to Alice Margaret D'Albaine, youngest and only surviving daughter of Archibald D'Albaine, D.D., of Merric Mead, Rostrevor, County Down. Also, Percival Egerton, of Southampton, to Minnie Swaine Chester, second daughter of John Chester, Esq., sen., of Merrick Square, Dublin, December 23rd.

So Minnie had her wish, with regard to the double wedding, and doubtless cared little that her dead love was sleeping in the quiet churchyard at Basingstoke.

In my new home, so far away from the old one, I had the various familiar things which had enriched our little bower at Southampton. Oftentimes it was extremely difficult to realize the fact that the fingers that were wont, in the past, to linger lovingly upon the keys of the piano or harmonium, were sweeping the strings of the golden harps in the better world. Ah, sweet consolation, that the loved ones, who have left me, have entered into eternal rest.

Miss Shelton is with me now; Miss Ellen married, and when I saw the announcement of the fact in the "Pall Mall Gazette," I wrote to my dear old friend, begging her to come and take up her abode with me, a proposition to which she gave a delighted assent. As I write I hear her voice, sweet still, singing,

> "Nearer my God to Thee,
> E'en though it be a cross,
> That raiseth me."

Now she is bending over me, her peaceful face corresponding with the prayerful praise which has just been uttered by her lips. Truly her life, day by day, is tending towards our Father's house on high. Yes, *our* Father, for he is mine also; I have tasted of that perfect love which casteth out fear. I love my Saviour, because He first loved me; He is the source of all my joy.

Four years ago, there came to me a sweet glad surprise; I found my long-lost brother Fred. It happened in this wise: I was one night persuaded to attend a concert, for which talented performers and vocalists had been engaged; it was given in aid of a large hospital for Incurables, and to enhance the attractiveness of the programme, several songs were announced to be sung in character. When

the *prima donna* of the evening (a Spanish lady) took her place upon the stage, her lustrous dark eyes, and rarely beautiful face, rivetted my attention. When she commenced her song I thought I had never listened to a voice so perfectly pure and clear. She sang "The Land o' the Leal," and ere she had finished, there was hardly a dry eye in the room. As the applause which greeted her, upon the completion of her song, subsided, her husband came forward to take his part in the evening's performance; his eyes seemed strangely familiar to me, and when his voice rang through the room, it struck upon my ear like some familiar but forgotten melody; I tried to think where I could have heard it before. He sang, "The Last Man," and really he seemed inspired. At its conclusion, the enraptured audience rose to their feet, *en masse*, and a hearty English cheer echoed through the building, mingled with shouts of "Bravo!" and "Encore!" Again he stood up to sing, and I recognized the song as the last one I ever heard Fred sing. I sat there as one entranced; I knew now why the eyes of the singer seemed so familiar to me, they resembled Fred's, yet no thought crossed my mind of the possible identity of the two persons. However, I asked numerous questions concerning the vocalists of the evening, but without gaining any particular information. The following evening I was present at a *conversazione*, to which several of the most celebrated singers of the day were invited, and there I met the *prima donna* of the previous evening. After our introduction to each other, she said, "How very funny it is that your name is Munro. That is our real name, though we are called by my maiden name, because it was known to the musical world before my marriage. I met my husband in America, and after our marriage, we came to England to win laurels from

the British public." I literally trembled as I implored her to tell me all about her husband, explaining that I had lost a brother who went to America, and that, in her husband, I traced a striking resemblance to him. I need not recount the conversation; suffice it to say that he proved to be my own brother Fred. He had made many attempts to find his family, and once had been very near tracing us, when my work on "Fatalism" had been put into his hands, by a friend. Upon perusing it, he came to the conclusion that he was on a false track, never for a moment supposing that his sister Margaret could have penned the sentiments contained in the book. He did not sail in the "Golden Age," but in the "Trafalgar;" reaching America safely he assumed the name of Spencer, and commenced his career as a public singer. Poor boy! his were hard lines for some time, but at last success crowned his efforts, and then he married one of America's brightest musical stars.

A fortnight ago, I received two letters through my publisher. They are but samples of the many that have reached me since my last effort, entitled "Spring Flowers," was issued from the press. One is from a poor pent-up child of labour, who writes: "The dear song of love has tuned my heart to seek the source from which that love springs." The other is from a sick person, who will only leave her chamber for the bourne from whence no traveller returns. It runs thus:—

"My Sister Friend,—

"I want to write and thank you for the great comfort which your 'Spring Flowers' have brought to me. I have loved and lost, and a kinship of spirit is drawing me

near to you. I never felt so much drawn toward you, as I have to-day. A year ago I lost my husband; he was my idol, and the parting with him was very bitter. To me there was no light breaking through the clouds; all was dark, and when he would have pointed me to God for comfort, I spurned the love of the Being who was taking my husband from me. Since I have read your book, I have felt that my bereavement was a link sent to bind me to heaven. I have been so much happier; the doubt and despair which had such possession of me, seem completely swept away. I have made a full surrender of myself to Jesus, and am now basking in the light of his love. I was inhaling the sweet perfume of your precious flowers yesterday. Their beauty is inexhaustible, and they went to my very soul. They do indeed strengthen me for the battle with the rebellious feelings that will rise in my heart, and make me long more than ever to lose my will in that of my heavenly Father. Their fragrance grows sweeter the more it is inhaled, and what is better, I believe they will never die; they are some of the never-withering flowers that bloom in the Everlasting Spring. May the smile of our dear Lord ever cheer and brighten your life. Mine will soon terminate, but the goal is before me, therefore my heart fainteth not. And now farewell, my more than friend; you have entered the secret chambers of my heart, and uprooted the bitterness that was there; you have shown me the way of peace, and led me to Jesus. What can I say more? I know not what blessing to crave for you, for out of His abundance of riches, Our Father will give you all things. With dear love,

"Believe me,

"Yours in undying affection,

"NELLIE."

Do you wonder that tears of joy dimmed my eyes as I read it?

The purpose of my life is being fulfilled, I am winning souls for Jesus. From my heart I can say, "Whom do I desire more than Thee? and whose service is so peaceful, or so happy."

It is time my story was ended, but I must record another fact or two.

Very recently, I met John Chester, who introduced me to his wife. He said he was proud of my friendship, and his wife, in her pretty graceful fashion, expressed her pleasure at meeting an authoress whom she loved for her writings, ere she saw her face. Did she know, I wonder, what a dark passage in the life of that authoress was known to her husband. At the same place I met Percival and Minnie. Percival is a rich man, therefore his wife is happy in her own way. She is still beautiful, but her beauty is not of the type which never dies. There is no soul-loveliness, in her lustrous eyes. I sometimes wonder if Percival ever thinks with compunction of the girl to whom he pledged his life's love, and afterwards forsook.

Mrs. Egerton courts me as she did in the days when my writings were erroneous, but famous, and speaks of my youthful engagement to her son, as if she prided herself upon the fact that I once loved him, without taking any shame to herself for the treacherous part which she played in the matter. Sitting in the seclusion of my study, I have just finished the perusal of an article by John Chester (the first I have ever seen from his pen). It is full of bright, glowing thoughts, winding up with these words:—"Truth is the

essence of a noble life. No life can be noble that is not *true*, and no life (however insignificant it may appear to a superficial observer) can be true without being noble." Thank you, John, for that truism! May our lives prove it!

Only a Life, with many threads unravelled, with much of good and evil woven together, with darkness and light intermingled. A life not finished, yet a life God has given; it is therefore precious in His sight, and He will gather up the broken threads, and weave them after one glorious pattern. "So shall I be satisfied when I awake in His likeness."

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